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THOUGHTS
ON THE
BAPTISMAL VOW.



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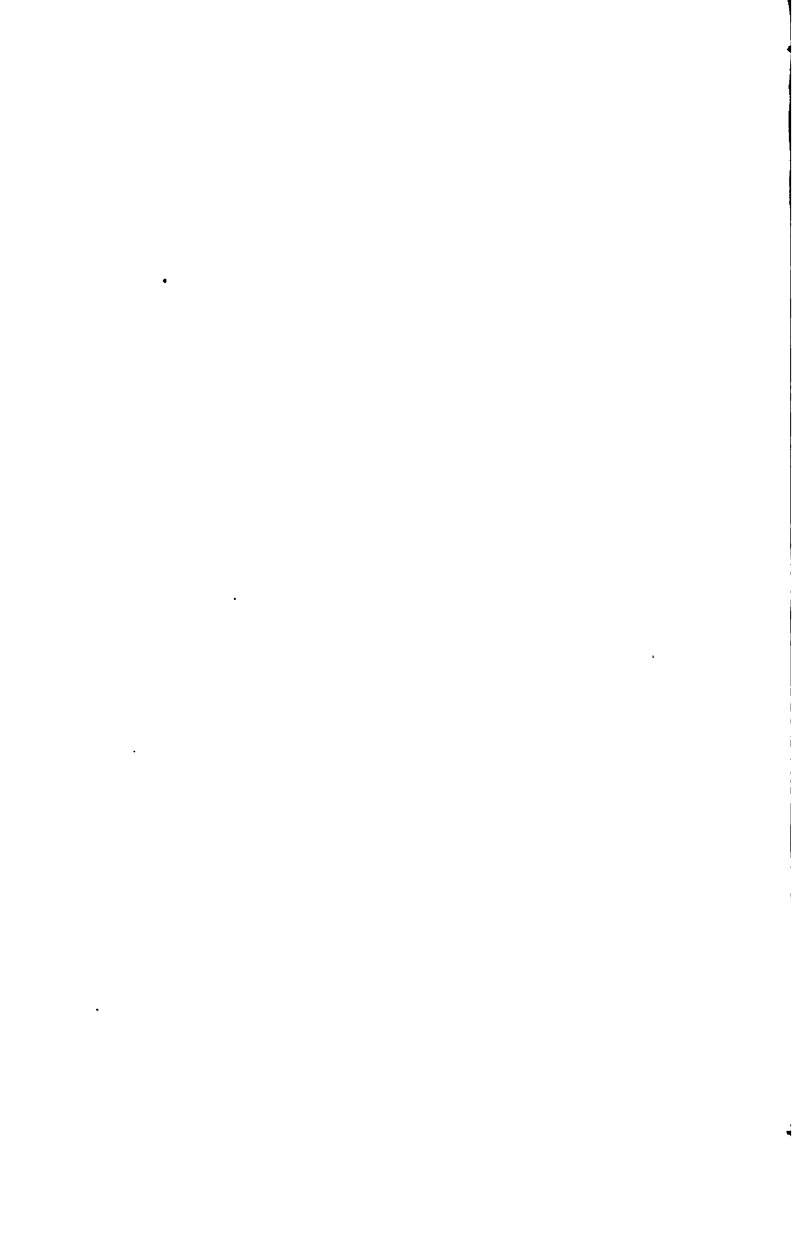
FOR YOUNG CHRISTIANS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
'A GRAVE SUGGESTION TO YOUNG CHRISTIANS;'
'A HELP TO DEVOTION.'



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THOUGHTS

ON THE BAPTISMAL VOW.

THE duties to which we are bound by the Vow made in Baptism are such as can only be properly understood by earnest thought upon them. They open out to us as we meditate, and we lose more of their real meaning than we can tell by neglecting so to search into it. And if we do not *understand* them aright, it must follow that our *obedience* will be very imperfect. So, indeed, it is with too many of us. Though the highest aim is set before us, and every needful help and encouragement is offered in order to enable us to reach it, we fail, and that often very miserably. As a body of 'Christians,' followers of Him Who is perfect in all Goodness, we might show the world a far higher example than we do of all that is good and

lovely in human nature, as purified by union with Him; and it is greatly to our shame that we do not do so. This is seen by those who are out of the pale of Christian society, if not by ourselves; and is a far greater hurt to the Cause which we have at heart than can be known now. Let each of us do his best to wipe off the reproach against us; and let us learn to look more closely into our Duty, that we may do it in a manner more worthy of the name we bear.

Those who have not been used to exercise themselves in this way, must not expect to find it easy at first; but as they persevere it will become more so. Far more encouragement is given to us than we deserve. The few thoughts that are here set down are offered as a help to such as wish to make a beginning in the closer study of their vow, in the hope that they may at least *lead* to fuller and clearer views—such as open out upon all who give their minds in earnest to these things.

‘Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.’

IN Holy Baptism, our Godparents promised three things in our name.

First—‘That I should renounce the devil and all his works.’

We do not know much of this Evil being—not more than God has seen fit to reveal to us for our warning; but what we do know is very awful. He is a spirit,—we cannot see him, but it is most certain that he *is*, and that he is continually on the watch to do us harm. ‘Like a roaring lion’ he ‘walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.’ Many things which we know to be real, are invisible to us.* We cannot see them, but we are as sure of their being as if we did. We cannot see persons at a great distance from us—we may never see them all our lives, and yet we do not doubt that there are such persons. We cannot see the air which we breathe, and yet we could not live one minute without it. We cannot see our own souls, and yet we know that we have souls, and that they are more powerful than our bodies; for our hands and feet, and all our other members, can do nothing of themselves, or contrary to the will which directs them. The soul, though invisible, makes itself known by the power which it has over the body. We cannot see the holy

* In what follows, some thoughts and expressions have been adopted from ‘The Child’s Manual.’ Other valuable help has been given, which can only be thus generally acknowledged.

angels, yet are they continually near us, though we may not be thinking of them.

So is Satan, our great spiritual enemy. We cannot see him, but he is very *real*, and, like our souls, is very active and powerful—far more so than we are *by ourselves*. He is, besides, very subtle, and full of malice and cunning—bent on doing all in his power to harm us, and bring us into sin and danger. For he is the enemy of our Lord, as well as of ourselves, and knows His love and care for us, and His will concerning our salvation. He would overthrow that Will if he could, and knows that the most effectual way of doing so would be to lead us to sin against it. He is not willing for that blessed time to come when all the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of Christ, for then his power will have come to an end, and he will be cast into the lake of fire. He therefore does all in his power to hinder the work of the Church, in which the foundations of the Kingdom of Heaven are laid. In the Holy Bible he is called ‘the prince of this world,’ for he is allowed to have some power over men now for a time. It was Satan who tempted our first parents, Adam and Eve, and caused mankind to fall from a state of purity and blessedness to a state of sin and misery. He it is who has tempted men, women, and children, to sin, ever since that sad time, and has caused all the pain, and grief, and wretchedness, that have ever been.

He wanders about the world, endeavouring to make men as wicked and miserable as possible. He wishes everybody to hate Religion, and to think that it will only cut them off from their worldly pleasures, instead of making them really happy and peaceful. He wishes to prevent us from *thinking* about it. He is glad when he sees people so busy in the way of money getting, or providing for their own pleasures, that they make no time for meditation and prayer; for he knows that they will never be really religious unless they do so. He is, doubtless, especially glad when those who have begun in a good course, get weary of trying to be good, fall into sin, and follow the ways of the world. But he is, surely, *best* pleased when he can make people think themselves religious, when they are not so. This is his greatest and most dangerous art. For what hope is there for those who fancy themselves too good or too wise to learn? Satan can make himself appear as 'an angel of light;' he can make his evil works seem right in the eyes of all those who do not sincerely endeavour to serve God with their whole heart. From him come all manner of opposition to God and goodness, as well as, more especially, all bad passions, unholy thoughts, and evil ways; and above all, falsehood, envy, hatred, and malice, cruelty, and pride. These are his 'works.' He was a liar and murderer from the beginning of the world. It was Satan who sought to lead the sin-

less One Himself into sin, after His long fast in the wilderness, when—blessed be His Name—He resisted and overcame his temptations in the power of God. It was Satan, too, who moved the enemies of our Lord against Him in all the pain and shame that, for our sakes, He endured at their hands; and in later times, it was the same evil one who raised persecution against the Church through its enemies on earth, whether Jews or heathen. Satan has legions of spirits under his command, who are, like himself, wicked and miserable, and powerful for mischief. All are our enemies. In former times, they were allowed to afflict mankind in a dreadful way, by inhabiting their bodies as well as tormenting their souls: such awful power over us does not appear to be granted to evil spirits now; but we do not know that there may not be a return of it. We cannot say that we are less deserving of such judgments than those were who suffered under them formerly. This is a fearful thought; but whether this particular evil be to be dreaded by us or not, there is the same need that we should be on our guard, lest we fall under the power of the devil and his angels. If we yield to their temptations to sin, we as surely endanger our souls as if we were actually ‘possessed,’ like those of whom we read in the New Testament.

How shall we be safe from the great power and malice of these evil spirits? We are indeed weak in ourselves, as compared with them; but with an

Almighty Friend and Protector on our side we need not fear. 'Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.' Therefore 'we will go forth in the strength of the Lord God,' and 'so shall no evil come near to hurt us.' 'Through God we will do great acts, for it is He that shall tread down our enemies.'

It is good for us to 'hold fast by God;' so shall we be safe from our enemies.

But if we would have His strength and protection from the power of evil, we must '*renounce it wholly*.' We must not only avoid the grosser kinds of sin, but withstand all the allurements of Satan in *every* shape. Those miserable people who are 'led captive by him at his will,' do not fall under his power and become very wicked all at once. They begin by doing wrong in little things. They say and do things which they know and feel are not right, but make themselves easy, as thinking that it is of no consequence, and that they can leave off sinning when they like. Then they do something rather worse, and quiet their conscience again by some means or other. After going on in this way for some time, they lose much of that sense of right and wrong which tormented them at first, but which would have guided them if they had attended to it. Their consciences become deadened. And when they have in this way quenched the Good Spirit, and so made room for the evil one, he comes—their cunning and

powerful enemy comes—to take possession of their hearts, and to lead them, soul and body, into ‘all evil and mischief.’ They become his slaves, and do his work. The evil habits they have formed are like a chain binding them fast—a chain which cannot be broken through. And Satan is a cruel master, as well as a subtle deceiver. He makes his way *appear* smooth and pleasant, especially at first; but those who follow it find themselves disappointed before very long, while they hardly know how to draw back. What was fair and beautiful outwardly, turns out to be full of rottenness and decay. What was sweet to the taste at first, changes to bitterness in the mouth. Vexations and difficulties spring up all around, where they were not expected. The sinful desire, even if it be gratified, brings no real or lasting satisfaction. Restless and uneasy, they cannot enjoy themselves, even though surrounded by all the good things of this world. They cannot know what true happiness is. For outward comforts do not *of themselves* give happiness, though we are apt to think so. The heart must be at ease, or we cannot thoroughly enjoy them. And peace never dwells in the heart that is turned from God. No heart can be really *at ease* which is not given up to Him, and does not rest calmly upon His goodness. All happiness comes from Him; and where He is not admitted—where the room is filled up by self, or by the evil spirit, there true

happiness is also shut out. If we could look into such a heart, we should find it a tumult of wretchedness—of sin and misery. There is indeed a *hardened* state which is even more dreadful than this—that which is described by the Apostle Paul, when he speaks of those ‘who, being *past feeling*, work all uncleanness with greediness.’ In this, there would appear to be *no hope*. Well may we pray, as we do in the Litany, to be delivered from it! Those who try to please God can always look for comfort from Him in the midst of any troubles which may be sent upon them; but it is not so with the slaves and followers of Satan. Their troubles are troubles indeed, from which there is no escape. They cannot avoid the bitter thought that their sufferings have been brought upon them by themselves, and that they are only receiving ‘the due reward’ of their deeds. They have rejected the service of a Heavenly Master, full of mercy and goodness, and chosen another for themselves, who will but mock at their distress. They are but receiving their wages. This is what all those must expect who choose the service of Satan.

O may we learn to *renounce* him and all his works, before he gains the mastery over us! May we be always on the watch against him and his wiles, lest he get any advantage over us! It is not likely that we shall be tempted at first to commit *great* crimes; but are we not in continual danger of offending in smaller matters—of giving

way to pride, ill-temper, unkind thoughts, sharp words, deceit in *little* things? Let us remember that these are all 'works of the devil,' the *beginnings* of his service; therefore let us, as we are bound to do, renounce them, and turn at once to our proper work—the service of our Heavenly Master.

Satan works through 'the world' and 'the flesh.' We must renounce him in each of these. He is called in Holy Scripture 'the god of this world,' because of his great power in it. St. John says that he 'deceiveth the whole world;' and that 'the whole world lieth in wickedness.' There are many millions of heathen living in the world at this time, who are ignorant of God, and of all that He has done for them, and are in a state of cruel bondage to the evil one. They do his works, and receive his wages. And, sad as it is to say so, far the greater number even of those who profess to be *Christians* do allow themselves to be deceived by him, and give themselves up to his service in a life of sin. Well, therefore, may this be called a 'wicked world,' as it is in the Catechism. And yet, though we know that it is so, it is not what we generally *think*. We know that many wrong, many wicked, things are said and done every day; but there is so much *more* of what appears to be good and 'respectable' in the goings on of the world in general, that, of ourselves, we should hardly have called it '*wicked*.' We might have

thought it harsh to say so, if we had not found it in the Holy Bible. *Being there*, we know it must be true and right. *What is wickedness?* The Bible-meaning of the word is not, perhaps, quite the same as our own. What does it mean *in the Bible?* *All that is contrary to the Will of God.* Now many things are contrary to this holy and blessed Will which are not thought of as being so, and which are done every day without fear. People do not *study* the Will of God, but take up their own and others' ideas of right and wrong, and so fall into sin continually, without knowing what they are doing. 'Wickedness' is generally thought to mean only such great and flagrant sins as bad language, robbery, and murder; and if people avoid these, and lead a respectable life (as it is called,) they are too apt to be satisfied with themselves, and to think that they are in a safe way. And yet, all the time, by the sins in which they allow themselves, they are but falling in with the ways of a 'wicked world.' We have no need to pass judgment upon our neighbours in this—as if they alone helped to make the world what it is—have we not, each of us, great reason to fear that we too are doing our part? The more we look into our own and other people's ways of going on, and compare them with the rules of life set before us in Holy Scripture, the more plainly shall we see *why* the world is called 'wicked' in the Catechism, and the better shall we understand

such sayings as that of St. John—‘The whole world lieth in wickedness.’ If it be ‘wicked’ to follow our own will instead of the holy Will of God—as it most surely is—the world is *full* of wickedness. *Selfishness* is wicked—the world is full of selfishness. *Pride* is wicked—the world is full of pride. *Unkindness* is wicked—the world is unkind. *Spiritual sloth* is wickedness—the world is too much taken up with its own business to find time to attend to religion. *Foolishness* is wickedness—the world is full of folly. A little serious thought shows us that we live in a bad world; but *how* wicked must it appear in the sight of the pure and loving angels of God, whose delight it is to do His Will, and to serve His creatures—still more, in the sight of the All-Holy God Himself!

How delightful it would be if, instead of being what it is, the world were full of good and holy people—people whose whole delight, like that of the angels, was in serving God and showing kindness to each other! There would then be no rudeness, harshness, or selfishness; no disputing, or evil-speaking; no deceit, or malice, or revenge. All would be gentleness and love. But this is our time of *trial* and *preparation* for the happier state to which we look forward; and evil though these things be in themselves, they are permitted now for the working out of our greater good. We *need* the discipline we meet with by coming in contact with this ‘wicked world;’ and by bearing

up against its contradictions, and resisting its temptations, through the grace given to us, we gain that strength for ourselves which cannot be looked for in any other way. It is the *smoothness*, rather than the *roughness*, of the world which is our great danger. So much of the evil in it is *hidden* from us, that we are liable to go wrong even when we think ourselves quite safe. The world is full of false appearances, not only as regards such things as we see with our bodily eyes, but also regarding things of a higher kind—spiritual things. And in *these* lies the greatest peril to our souls. We may well be on our guard here. But how? In what way can we detect the spirit of the world when it would lead us wrong by its false appearances? We must learn to *know the world* so far as to be able to do this. This we may do by thinking and observing, each for himself. If we consider, we shall find that it is *want of faith* that lies at the *root* of all worldliness—not love of wickedness for its own sake—but such an *over-love* of the good things which can be enjoyed now as *shuts out* the better things to which we *look forward*. Now the blessings of this present life are given to us by our loving Father in Heaven for our use and enjoyment; and we *may* enjoy them, as from Him, with thankfulness; but we must not trust to them for happiness, or seek after them with such eagerness as to forget the higher blessings which are yet in store for us, and

to risk the loss of them. This is what worldly people *do*. Losing sight of the great Realities which are now only matters of faith, they set their minds upon the little things of this lower world. They neither perform great duties, nor do they look forward to great pleasures—such as are promised to those who serve God faithfully. They try to lay hold of all the *little* pleasures within their reach *now*, instead of striving to secure the *heavenly* ones which are promised to us. *This is worldliness*, and this is what we must avoid. We may see it in people who have, as we should say, much good in them; much kind and honourable feeling, and even religious dispositions—people whom, on many accounts, we cannot but love and respect, and even look up to, as better than ourselves. But we must be none the less on our guard against it, for both our own sakes and theirs. We have the more *need* to guard ourselves, as, in order to excuse themselves for their worldliness, people are apt continually to reason in a way that makes *wrong appear right*. If they have a mind to indulge themselves in some doubtful pleasure, they too often make it out that it is not only allowable, but a sort of *duty*, to do so. Almost every kind of sinful enjoyment may be, and is, defended in this way. We can only save ourselves from the danger of such false reasoning, by a resolute determination (not made in our own strength alone,) to *go in the right path at all costs*. We may then ask our-

selves—when tempted to indulge in some doubtful pleasure—first, whether it is really innocent in itself, and next, whether it is *safe* for us—more likely to do us good, than to weaken us, and make us lose our sense of right and wrong.

What are '*the pomps and vanity*' of this wicked world,' which we have promised to renounce? They are the grand and showy things which worldly people think so much of, and strive so earnestly to obtain—such as fine and costly *dress*, in particular.* People value these things, because they look well, and draw attention to themselves. Thoughtless people are easily attracted by outward show of this kind. But the notice and favour of such persons is hurtful and dangerous to us. We are apt to think too much of ourselves without their admiration. We need, instead, every kind of help we can have in the way of *humbling* ourselves. Those who are puffed up with pride of dress, or any other kind of pride, will find themselves unable to 'enter in at the strait gate,' and to walk in 'the narrow way' that leads to eternal life. And, after all, there is no *solid* good in all

* In this matter, however, *as in everything else*, let us be careful how we judge others. What would be *to us* 'pomps and vanity,' may not be so to *them*; for it may be suitable to their station, and in some sense a duty. And, in our own station, it is not well to be, outwardly, so different from others as to draw attention to ourselves. There might be as much 'vanity' in this as in fine dress.

this show which people take such delight in. The pleasure coming from it lasts but for a very short time, and leaves an unpleasant taste behind it. It is '*vanity*,' and vanity is emptiness—unprofitableness. Fine dress and adornments of other kinds may be spoiled in a moment—we may lose them at any time; and if so, we should lose all the good they brought with them—such as it is. But the good belonging to *a single good action lasts for ever*. By denying ourselves to help others, we may secure *this*, while we turn away from the vanities that would lead us astray. Let us be thankful for the many blessings that are given to us, but be careful not to let our thoughts or desires dwell too much upon anything of earth, lest we fall into sin, and so lose the *best* things. When tempted to long for the vanities in which we see others indulge themselves, let us remember that we have solemnly promised to 'renounce' all such things, and turn our thoughts to the *needs of others*. We shall find this a greater *help* to ourselves in keeping this part of our vow, than we can imagine until we have tried it.

There is a great principle laid down for us as to the place which heavenly things ought to hold, as compared with earthly, in our desire and pursuit; it is this—

'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.'

We know Who it was that said this. Our Lord meant *necessary food and clothing* when He spoke of 'these things;' He tells us to seek 'the kingdom of God and His righteousness' before *them*. Much more, then, should we seek them before things which would be to us only 'poms and vanity.' And yet there are many, very many, who 'seek first' the actual 'poms and vanity of this wicked world,' while they try to be religious also! This is the *rule* of 'the world'—exactly the contrary to the rule given us by our Master. *But it is impossible.* We cannot be religious unless we can make up our minds to part with all that we naturally love here. We 'cannot serve God and mammon.' We must 'renounce the world,' with all its 'poms and vanity,' or we cannot hope to secure the things belonging to 'the Kingdom of God.' What *folly* is it to make the attempt, when our Lord Himself has warned us not to do so! Can we not trust His Word that we shall be no losers in the end if we follow *His* rule?

Now, if we see the folly of worldly wisdom in this matter, we may learn not to think too much of worldly ways and opinions in general. They can be no safe guides for us, for they do not agree with the rules given us by our Lord. In any doubtful matter, we may distrust our own judgment; but we must not do anything merely because *others* do it, or we shall often be led far wrong. Before we follow their example, we must

consider *what rule* it is that they follow. And for the same reason, it is not well to care *too much* about what others may *say* of us. We cannot indeed take too much care to act so that they shall 'have no evil thing to say' of us *with truth*, and we ought not to let our 'good be evil spoken of,' if we can help it; but *having done right*, let us rest in the thought that our Father in Heaven knows it, and that we shall 'have praise' from Him in due time. How can we care *much* for the mistaken or unkind judgments of the world concerning us when we do that? And yet there are few, even amongst those whom we should call 'good' people, who can take the full benefit of this comfort. Why? Because they are not careful *enough* to keep their *conscience clear*—there is some little *mixture* of evil in their motives, which comes in as a cloud between them and the Favour of God. Have we not all felt this?—and how the evil in us, however small it may appear, gives the *sting* to anything that may be said against us, though false in itself? Let us be warned, then, for the future, and not miss our best consolation through *imperfect obedience*.

On the other hand, we may expect to hear some people *spoken well of* by the world, who are yet very far from being good Christians. This also we are taught to look for, as well as to *fear* for ourselves. 'Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!' We shall remember

that it was our Lord Who said these words—He Who alone *deserved* the praise of all men, and was yet *reviled* by them, and treated as the worst of criminals. The praise of the world is the praise of ignorant and thoughtless people, (as regards what is best worth knowing,) who ‘judge after the outward appearance,’ while they know little or nothing of what passes *within*—in the heart. This it is *at the best*; but worldly praise is often nothing better than *flattery*, such as he who gives it knows to be *false* praise, undeserved, and only given for some unworthy reason—perhaps merely to gain the same in return! The special *danger* of this is, that it is apt to fall in too readily with our own good opinion of ourselves, and is not therefore rejected, as we should otherwise *see* that it ought to be. Many are the ‘wise’ people who have fallen through this. But we may help ourselves against it by keeping watch over our hearts, and giving an answer in our own mind to all such hurtful suggestions. There is no need to be *unreal*—to deny any good which may belong to us—that we may be thankful for; but is there not much in us that is *faulty*, which it will be useful to remember when we are in danger from over-praise?

Lest pride and self-satisfaction should steal over us, (utterly spoiling our *best* deeds!) let us reason with ourselves in this way at such times:—‘If it be *true* that I am what people say of me, is it a

thing to be *proud* of? Did I make myself so? How much better and cleverer I might have been if I had taken more pains with myself! How *little* I have done compared with what many others have done, whose advantages perhaps were fewer than my own!—and how much less than I *ought* to have done! “The whole world lieth in wickedness:” is it any great merit in me to have avoided some of its *worst* sins, and to have learnt *something* of goodness? What great *sacrifices* have I made? What great *trouble* have I taken? How have I *denied myself*? But perhaps the praise bestowed upon us may be wholly *undeserved*. Well may we think—in such a case—what will such praise avail us at the Great Day, if we be found *then* to be unworthy? Oh, may we always love, and seek to attain, ‘the praise of God’ rather than ‘the praise of men!’—for in that alone shall we find true comfort and satisfaction when all else fails. ‘For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.’ If all *other* thoughts should fail to keep us humble, the remembrance of all that has been *done for us*, in tender Love and Mercy, yet remains. When shall we come to the end of that? And what room will then be found for *self*, with all its sins and follies?

WE have promised to renounce also 'the sinful lusts of the flesh.'

What is 'the flesh?' It is that corrupt nature with which we were born—which we all have from our first parents, and which continually leads us into sin. Although we were washed in Holy Baptism, and received forgiveness of sin at that time, yet have we fallen again into sin, and are all, more or less grievously, defiled by it. The cleansing of Baptism was the *beginning* of God's spiritual work in us: a further work remains to be done, in which He wills us to take a share. That work is completely to *subdue* this evil yet clinging to our nature—to 'renounce the sinful lusts of the flesh.'

'The flesh' is the same as the 'old man,' and the 'carnal mind,' spoken of in Holy Scripture. 'The carnal mind is at enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' 'The old man . . . is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts.' It leads us away from God—it makes us selfish, unjust, unkind, and unholy. It leads us into all kinds of evil, but especially into sloth, intemperance, and unchastity. And in following these, it leads also to great unhappiness, restlessness, and discontent, for it is *impossible to satisfy it*.

It is very subtle, and often hides itself so completely, that people do not know of it in them-

selves, though they may see its workings plainly *in others*.

It is very *deeply rooted* in us—very *strong*, and therefore very hard to get the better of. It would have been impossible for us to overcome it in our unregenerated state; and that can only be done *now* by the help of the Grace given to us—along with earnest striving on our own part.

The ‘sinful lusts’ of the flesh are the strong desires of our fallen nature—desires which arise in our own hearts, contrary to the Will of God. It is natural to us to be continually wishing for something or other which He does not see fit that we should have. These wishes are the ‘sinful lusts’ of the flesh. We must not give way to them. We must strive earnestly to *resist* them. We must learn the *habit* of doing so. This is *renouncing* the ‘sinful lusts of the flesh,’ as we promised at our Baptism.

Let us always remember that we have this evil nature within us, and learn continually to struggle against it, until, by God’s Grace, it is perfectly subdued. Let us always *hope* that it will be so, and strive with that hope. The sinful desires which beset us may concern only *little* things—too small perhaps even to speak of—things which *seem* to be of no consequence; yet the sin is *not* small that we shall commit by indulging ourselves in anything only doubtful—so let us beware how we do it.

As so many people are *blind* to their danger—the danger *within* them—we have the more need to take care—to fear such blindness for ourselves. Let us therefore learn to notice the *secret workings* of ‘the sinful lusts of the flesh,’ that we may find it out, guard against it, and prepare to *resist* it manfully.

This sinfulness of our nature is not *weakness* merely—it is *disease*; and disease of such a kind, as, if it be not checked, will *kill* us, soul and body.

Now, diseases of the body are not cured but by the use of some painful remedy; and thankful may sufferers be, if by such means they recover. They do not refuse them, however contrary to their liking, when ordered for them by one in whose skill they can place full trust. So it is too with the diseases of our souls. When we think of the deadly evil which our ‘sinful lusts’ would work in us, if unchecked, how could we shrink from that which was to work its cure, though painful in itself?

The great Physician of our souls, Who knows us, our danger, and our needs, far better than we can possibly know ourselves, has provided such a remedy for our use. Painful indeed to flesh and blood, but such as we shall not shrink from, if we truly believe and trust in Him—our ever-blessed Lord and Saviour, Who died that He might purchase Life for us, body and soul. How can we think

anything hard that He has not only commanded, but *shown us how* to practise, by His own blessed example? If it be a painful remedy, does He not know what it is to us? and would He not, in His great Love, have spared us the use of it, if it were not necessary? Can we then safely put it away from us, and try to do without it? Yet this is what Christians are continually attempting, finding all manner of excuses for their weakness and folly and disobedience. But vainly may we hope to benefit by all that He has done for us, without *doing as He has said*. What are His own words?

‘If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.’

This saying is repeated several times for our instruction, as if to show us its great importance. *Let us receive it*, as from our Lord. Let us place no *half-trust* in Him, and pay no shrinking obedience to His Word; but in humble faith and loving confidence follow where He leads, whatever the cost may be. Let us learn to deny ourselves *to the uttermost*, if it be His Will. If that Will should prove to be death itself, will He not give us a *better* Life for that which now we lose?

‘Whosoever will save his life, shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it.’

‘He that hateth his life in this world, shall keep it unto Life eternal.’

These words have given to thousands strength to suffer and to die for their Lord, who are now rejoicing in their eternal gain. But it is not to *martyrs* alone that they were said; and it is not martyrs alone who may so trust in them, and act upon them, as to draw out their full meaning, with all its untold blessedness. Each of us may do that for himself. We are called to do so.

To gain Life by dying—to secure happiness by giving up that which we long for:—it is a mystery to us—we cannot understand how it should be. But we can know and understand *enough* to guide ourselves aright; and let us see that we do so. The way which is pointed out to us so plainly by our Blessed Lord is also the way of His Church. He tells us to deny ourselves; the Church says the same—leading us to follow, not His *teaching* only, but His *example*—helping us to *tread in His steps*, so far as we may.

This is the meaning of those penitential seasons and ordinances of fasting which we are called upon to observe. We find them in our Prayer Book; and all those who know and do their duty as members of the Church do observe them. There are, unhappily, very few Christians of this sort; but the rule of duty stands just the same, whether it be observed by few or many. It is very *sad*; but it need not *surprise* us to

find that there should be so much neglect in these things, for 'the world, the flesh, and the devil,' are *all combined* against the use of them. These we know to be our deadly enemies, and we are now considering how best to resist their power.

Let us, then, think about *fasting*. What is it? It was better understood and practised in former times than it is, generally, now; but we may hope that the spirit of old times is reviving, and that Christians are returning to their duty in this matter. The most simple and direct form of fasting, is to *keep from food* for a longer time than usual, or to *take less* at regular meal-times. Also, to avoid *meat*, and the better kinds of food, generally. But there are many *modes* of fasting, and it is left to each of us to use that which seems best. It should be something unpleasant to 'the flesh;' not merely refraining from *sins* we are prone to, but *self-denial in things innocent*. Anything *short* of this is not 'fasting,' however good and necessary it may be. But this—refraining from what we like in order to perform this part of religious duty—is 'fasting,' though it may not be a lessening of food. *That*, if we can bear it, is the best way; but we are not all alike in this respect—some are weak in body, and what could be done by others without hurt, might be injurious to them. But even weak persons might, in many cases, deny themselves the *pleasanter*

kinds of food, though they could not safely lessen the *quantity* of it. Where *this* cannot be done, some other form of self-denial must be used ; and if we are in earnest, we shall not have very far to seek for it.

Those who speak against this religious exercise, (whether from ignorance, or because they are unwilling to practise it themselves,) dwell much upon the harm done to the body by it : the *truth* is, rather, that the *proper* use of it would be *good* for most of us, in *our bodies* as well as in our souls. Yet there are *dangers*, of both kinds, which we must wisely guard against. Some few persons, amongst the few who fast at all, may perhaps injure their health, and their power of usefulness, by taking less food than they require. It is not necessary, nor is it well, that we should do this.

But the more *serious* danger is that of fasting in a *wrong spirit*. The exercise is meant to humble us. But it *may* have a contrary effect, unless we are watchful over ourselves. Unlike other good deeds, it does not naturally bring with it that sense of *satisfaction* which is so comfortable and encouraging. It is chastening, mortifying. (This is the special *benefit* of it, though we may not feel it to be so.) Missing this comfort, there is a *fear* lest we make an unhealthy one for ourselves, and begin to dwell upon our supposed *goodness* in performing this part of our duty, and

to compare ourselves with others who neglect it, as *better* than they are. And so, we may become *proud*, even in the very use of the means which were intended to help us to be humble. And 'the world,' blind as it is to the meaning and good of this ordinance, will assuredly *see* this evil effect in us, and so we shall injure the cause of good in others, as well as in ourselves. But *every* good thing may be abused in the same way. It is not fasting *alone* that is in danger of it, though it may be more necessary to be cautious in that than in other Christian exercises. See Matt. vi. 16-18. We can but, bearing in mind the words of St. Paul, in *all* these things 'work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.' We *may* be going wrong, when we think ourselves most safe and right. But to neglect fasting altogether, because it is possible to fast in a wrong spirit, would be *certainly* wrong. This, however, will not be the real reason for sparing ourselves. No; it is *the 'flesh'* that cries out against fasting, and would fain shrink from the pain of it. Shall we hear it? Shall we spare it? Where is then the *spirit* of a Christian soldier, fighting in his Master's cause? He, 'the Captain of our salvation,' was made 'perfect through sufferings.' Shall we seek out an easier way?

'They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.'

WE have promised also to 'believe all the Articles of the Christian Faith.'

What are 'the Articles of the Christian Faith?' And where are they to be found?—They are the great Truths which are contained in the three Creeds of the Church. Which are they?—The Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Creed of St. Athanasius—all in the Prayer Book. Each of these contains a summary of 'the Articles of the Christian Faith,' more or less opened out; and these are what we are bound, as Christians, to 'believe.'

This duty of *believing* is one of a very different kind from those we have before considered, belonging to the *first* Promise made in Baptism. By *that* Promise we are bound to *give up* certain *evil* things; this binds us to *accept and 'hold fast* that which is *good.*' Let us endeavour fully to understand what is here required of us—*what it is* to 'believe,' as Christians should. We have already *touched* upon it, in what was said of 'the world,' which does *not* believe. We know very well what it is to 'believe,' when speaking of common matters, belonging only to this life. When we say we believe anything, we mean that we *depend upon it as true*, we accept it for truth, we have no doubt about it. This, too, is the meaning of the word in the Catechism, when speaking of the 'Articles of the Christian Faith;' we own

ourselves bound to *accept them as true*, to *trust in their reality*. We believe truths relating to the things of this world, because they are told us by people whom we know we can trust;—for the same *kind* of reason, only a far *higher* one, we may well believe the ‘Articles of the Christian Faith,’ for it is not *good men* only who teach them to us, but the great God of Truth Himself. ‘If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.’ We shall not find any of the Creeds, in so many words, in the Holy Bible, but the *substance* and *meaning* of them is there, and, just as they are, they have been held in the Church from very early times. All the best men who have lived in the world for many ages, have held them, and lived upon the great Truths which they contain; and if there were no other reason for believing them, this would be enough. But those who have time, and are able to study the grounds of the Christian Faith, find a great many other proofs of their truth *besides* this. When they are looked into, and compared together, they are found to *agree with each other*, and with what we see and know of things as they are now, in a wonderful and beautiful way. The more closely they are examined, the more *fully* does their truth appear. Learned men can take in more of these proofs than simple ones, but the mind of the most learned man is too small and too weak to be able to take in many. If we *could* take deeper and

higher views of Truth than we can, the more should we see to strengthen our Faith in what we are taught to believe. And yet there are unhappy people who not only shut out the Truth from their own hearts, but do all they can to unsettle the faith of others. Unhappy, indeed, they are; for while they lose all the comfort which true Religion would give them, they have *nothing* to supply its place—they are without hope, as they are without God, in this world; miserable themselves, and leading others into misery too.

Now, while we pity these most wretched people, we may take a solemn warning from them for ourselves. They were not always as they are now; there was once a time with most of them when, as children, they professed to believe as we do. But they held their faith *loosely*, and did not act upon it. Then, living to themselves, and not to God, they began to *wish* that His words were not true, such solemn words as those in the ninth Psalm: 'The wicked shall be turned into hell; and all the people that forget God.' And so, wandering on further into the darkness, away from the only true Light, they lost themselves in sin, error, and unbelief, they became 'infidels,' led captive by the devil at his will. Who shall save or help them, now that they have cast off God, and chosen the service of His enemy? *They held their faith loosely* at the beginning; here is the warning for us. Let us see, then, and

seriously consider whether *our* faith is what it should be. There are different *degrees* of Faith; we should all *aim* at the *highest*, and not content ourselves until we have attained to it.

This is the 'certainty' (which cannot be shaken) of 'those things which are most surely believed among us,' and in which, as members of the Church, we 'have been instructed.' It is 'the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' It is the stay of our souls, 'an anchor both sure and steadfast.' It is our support under all labours that are 'in the Lord,' making us to know that in Him they shall not be in vain, nor shall even the least of them in any case lose its reward, causing us also as to the sufferings of this present time to reckon that they 'are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us,' that 'exceeding and eternal weight of glory,' which 'our light affliction, which is but for a moment,' doth work.

With faith like this, how could we shrink from any duty—however difficult? We *are*, most of us, weak enough to do this constantly; but that shows that our *faith* is not as it should be. It hardly deserves the name of 'faith' at all. So far as we think we *have* faith—what is it? If it is nothing *more* than a blind unthinking assent to what we are taught, it will not stand the tests to which it will be put as we go on in the world. Though our lives may pass smoothly now, and no

great temptations assail us, a time of trial—perhaps very severe trial—will certainly come; so let us prepare ourselves, and strengthen our faith against it. How may this best be done? There are *two* ways of helping ourselves—both necessary. The first and best way of strengthening our faith is to *act* upon it—to *do what we know to be right*—trusting that our promised reward will come in the end. So—praying and striving—we shall assuredly draw down a blessing upon ourselves, and shall find our faith grow and strengthen continually. The other way of helping our faith (though it is but *part* of this, after all,) is often to *meditate* on the great Truths which we wish to ‘believe’ more fully; to bring them before our ‘minds’ eye,’ by *thinking* upon them, steadily and earnestly—*shutting out all other thoughts* for the time. This is what we all *can* do, and great power for good comes with it. But people do not know or think of this, in general, and very few exercise their minds in this way.* It is through this that

* Most persons (amongst those who look beyond this world at all) content themselves with reading, or hearing, or repeating holy words, *without dwelling upon them* in order to bring out their great meaning. They think they have done enough if, besides praying, they read a chapter in the Holy Bible every day, or perhaps twice in the day. And when they repeat the words—those high and solemn words—of the Creeds, in the Services of the Church, it is too often without *any* thought of what they are saying. Besides the *irreverence* of this, it is a greater hurt and loss to ourselves than we can tell.

Christians, as a body, remain weak and faithless, while their enemies are ever active in evil. They throw all the blame of their short-comings upon the 'weakness of human nature,' without using the means placed in their power for helping themselves. But such folly as this forms no real excuse for us. Let us be wiser while we may, and use the power placed in our hands for good. Let us strive to *obey* in all things, and learn to *meditate* in particular. So shall we be able to keep the second Vow made for us in Baptism—to 'believe all the Articles of the Christian Faith.'

OUR *third* Vow is 'to keep God's holy Will and Commandments, and walk in the same all the days of our life.'

Have we ever looked into this Vow, and tried to see what it binds us to do? The words are few; but who could number the thoughts and purposes that should grow out of them? We might well be discouraged—we might well be *afraid*—even to make a *beginning* in this great study, but that we know that we may reckon upon as much *help* as we need in the attempt to fulfil our Vow. As it is, let us 'thank God, and take courage,' though with shame for our past shortcomings, and such distrust of ourselves as shall keep us humble and careful for the future.

'To keep God's holy Will and Commandments, and walk in the same all the days of our life.' In other words, *To do all that God would have us do.* Can it be, then, that the great and good God—'the High and Holy One, Who inhabiteth Eternity'—He Who created the Universe, with the innumerable worlds which it contains—Who is able to do all that He wills—can it be that He indeed cares in any sense for the doings of such as ourselves—worms of earth? Does He, in reality, deign to take notice of the way in which we spend our time, and has He any *will* with regard to it? We know that it is so. Wonderful as it may seem, it is most true that the great God of Heaven

and earth *looks for our services*, and *accepts* them in His beloved Son, if they are offered with humble and believing hearts. He *desires* us to do certain things, and is *displeased* if we leave them undone. We *know* this; but it cannot be that we *consider* it, or our lives would be very different from what they are. We might perhaps do nearly the same things, in many ways, but at least the *spirit* in which we did them would be different. We should not be thinking so much of either ourselves or other people in what we do—we should turn all our thoughts towards Him Whose servants we are; and our anxiety would be to please Him, and to secure His favour, rather than to gain *any* earthly good, however desirable. If He were not the good and gracious God He is, we should do this *from fear*—shall we not much rather, knowing His *Love* towards us, serve Him *from love*?

We have work to do for God. But how shall we know *what it is*? How is His Will made known to us? When our earthly parents desire us to do anything, they tell us in words that we can hear and understand. How does our Father in Heaven speak to us—He Whom we can neither hear nor see—how does He show us His Will? We cannot, indeed, either see or hear Him, yet He speaks to us in a way we can plainly understand. He speaks to us in many ways—through everything that He has given to us—either in ourselves, or in the world around us. If our hearts

are not closed, we may 'read Him *everywhere*.' First, in the great 'Book of Nature'—His wonderful and beautiful works of Creation. 'Wonderful and excellent' indeed they are; yet because they are *common*, because we see and enjoy them every day, we neglect to think of them. We *use* them for our own pleasure or profit, but fail to learn from them that which they would teach us of Him Who made them. We are very far wrong in all this, and are greater *losers* than we can tell, until we wake up to a fuller sense of our duty.

Let us study the Book of Nature more; it will not only teach us many heavenly lessons in itself, but it will help us greatly to understand what God says to us in other ways. The heathen of old may put us to shame here, for they did study Nature, and were the better for what they learnt in that way.

Conscience, also—that sense of right and wrong with which we are born—is a Voice of God within us, showing us His Will in many things—telling us what to do, and what to avoid. The greater heed we give to this Voice, the more plainly will it speak to us; yet it is not of itself sufficient, and there is no small danger lest we should mistake for it the craving of our own wills or opinions, and so be led into error. Much more is given to us to help us to a right knowledge and understanding of God's holy Will, than what we have even in Nature and Conscience.

Though it is not now (even with His People) as it was in those blessed days when God talked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden; yet, even in the midst of the great Silence which has fallen upon us, we also may know of Him and of what He would have us do. We know that—even since the Fall—there have been times when He vouchsafed to speak to His servants, though after a mysterious manner, with a Voice that could be heard, telling them plainly of His Will. And those who heard, made known that Will to others. We shall remember what is said of Noah, Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Elijah, and others, who enjoyed that most wonderful privilege, in the ancient times of the world. But still more wonderful and more blessed was the privilege of those who lived in later times—the Apostles and Disciples of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. They heard that which ‘many prophets and kings’ had desired to hear, and had not heard—the Voice of Him Who, being God, became Man for our sakes. They—St. Peter, St. James, St. John, and the rest, actually ‘looked upon,’ their ‘hands handled,’ and their ears heard, the Word of Life. They lived continually in the Presence of our Blessed Lord—they saw His miracles—they heard His teaching—they could ask Him questions, and receive His answers—they were directed by Him what to do, warned by Him what they must expect, and what to avoid; commended or re-

buked by Him according as their ways pleased or offended Him. Who can think of those times without wishing that they had lived in them? That they, like the Disciples of our Lord, had seen Him when He visited this fallen world, and had heard Him, the God-man, speak as ‘never man spake?’ But did He not speak *to us*, even then? Was it not *for us, especially*, that those gracious words were meant—‘Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed?’

Now it is eighteen hundred years ago, and more, since these words were heard on earth by those who then lived on it; can we, at this time, know *as certainly* as the Disciples of our Lord knew, what He would have us do? The heavenly tones of that Voice have, indeed, long passed away—that Divine Form is no longer to be seen amongst us; yet do those Words remain to teach us still, being written down by those who heard them, and kept by the Church, through God’s good Providence, until this time. In spite of all the attempts made by evil spirits and wicked men to destroy them, (and these have been many and fierce,) the very sayings of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ—the sayings heard by His own Disciples—have *come to us*! We have those Heavenly Words in our Bibles, and we may hear them in Church, or read them at home, continually. We have shown ourselves grievously *unworthy* of this precious treasure—we have not prized it—we have

not used it as we ought; yet it is *ours*, and one for which we shall have to give account. Let us learn to pay reverent heed to it, as those who will have to be judged by it hereafter. Let us hear it, and strive to lay hold of all that it says to us; and above all let us obey it. Let us help ourselves by thinking what the saints of old would have thought and felt about this privilege which we possess. Let us think how David in particular, the 'Man after God's own Heart,' would have prized it—how he would have *rejoiced* to hear the words which we may hear. So far as God's holy Will was made known to His servants at that time, they loved it and revered it. How would they have prized the more blessed Truths which we have in the New Testament! David, we know, wrote many of the Psalms, and in them we may see how he loved and treasured the Word of God. He, or some other holy man like-minded, there says:—'The law of Thy mouth is dearer unto me than thousands of gold and silver.' 'Lord, what love have I unto Thy law: all the day long is my study in it.' 'Mine eyes long sore for Thy Word.' 'I have kept Thy commandments, and loved them exceedingly.' 'More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb.' 'O how sweet are Thy words unto my throat: yea, sweeter than honey unto my mouth.'

And yet David knew not what *we* know—of all

that is told us in the Gospels—concerning Him Who, as the ‘Son of David,’ came from Heaven to live and die for us. How would he have *wondered* at our coldness, our dulness, our miserable want of faith and love!

Let us think, too, of those holy Christians of former times who, through the help of God, kept the Truth for us, which is laid up in the Holy Scriptures, even at the cost of their own lives. If they had not been ready to risk these—if, through fear of suffering and death, they had given up their precious charge—if they had obeyed the wicked orders of their heathen rulers, and so the Holy Scriptures had been destroyed, how would it have fared with us in these easy times?

Let us think, also, of those patient and earnest-minded Christians in later times, who laboured to make the Holy Scriptures *plain* to us; who translated them with so much care and exactness, in spite of the many and grievous hindrances which they met with from the enemies of the Truth; and then procured for us, from the powers of this world, leave to hear and to read them. Many of them suffered in the fire for their endeavours to serve God and His Church. But for them (unless other help had been found) we might still have been in the darkest ignorance concerning ‘God’s holy Will and Commandments,’ even though the Bible itself had been spared to us. If, with all these means of knowing our duty, we should be

ignorant, or forgetful, or heedless about it—if, when Almighty God has been pleased, in His great mercy, to show us what we ought to do, and we neglect to attend or to obey, what excuse can be found for us? The heathen, who have never heard, may hope for mercy, but how could we do so?

This is not all. God's Will is indeed made known to us in Holy Scripture, and this is now spread abroad over the world, being translated into many different languages, so that it may be understood by all who speak them. Many souls, amongst those who would otherwise have been in utter darkness, have by this means been led to believe, and to come to God's 'marvellous Light;' but others have *closed their eyes to it*, choosing to remain in sin and unbelief. And of those amongst ourselves who have had the opportunity of learning holy lessons from the Bible ever since they could understand anything, how few are there who have benefited as they might have done! If the Bible is read, how little is it attended to, how soon forgotten, and how very imperfectly *acted upon*! Again, how many *disputes* are constantly arising as to its meaning—disputes which take up people's time and thoughts from the *use* which should be made of it by themselves! And some, we know, even use it to justify themselves in sin and error—'wresting' its meaning 'to their own destruction.'

All this, sad as it is, need not surprise us. God,

in His great mercy, has bestowed this great gift upon us; but, by nature, we are not *able* to use it aright—we cannot love it, or understand its hidden wisdom. Even with the Holy Book in our hands, we may miss our way to Heaven; for, without faith, we are spiritually *blind*—we cannot see what God in mercy shows us; we wander on in darkness, though the light is all around us.

But He who bestowed upon us the great and blessed gift of the Holy Scriptures knows all this. He knows our natural weakness and wilfulness, our ingratitude to Himself, and the danger of our misusing His best gifts. And He has provided a remedy. How has the Holy Bible been *kept* hitherto in the world, through so many hundreds of years, and in spite of such fierce attempts to destroy it? And who are they that now read it to us, explain its meaning, and train us in obedience to its commands? Are they not the teachers who have been set over us by our blessed Lord Himself—the Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, of the Holy Catholic Church? Through their ministry we receive *a new nature* in baptism, with the gift of the Holy Spirit; and if we humbly learn of them—giving heed to their teaching for Christ's sake, obey the directions which they give us, and carefully attend upon the holy ordinances which they administer to us, *we shall be able to understand aright* what God has made known to us of His Holy Will. Our eyes will be opened

more and more to 'see the wondrous things' of His Law; and we shall be taught and helped to 'run the way' of His Commandments. We shall not 'walk in darkness,' but shall follow Him who is the 'Light of Light,' 'until the day break, and the shadows flee away' for evermore.

A *spirit of obedience* is, indeed, that which will, in time, make all things plain to us, such as are good and necessary for us to know. 'If any man will do His Will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.' God gives further supplies of His Holy Spirit—Him who can alone enlighten our minds—'to them that obey Him.' He requires us to be ready to give up our own frail human will, if we would understand and follow His perfect Will. And shall we not humbly endeavour to do so? It is a *most* difficult lesson for poor human nature to learn, but, by God's Grace, it *may* be learnt. And then, who but they that have so denied themselves can tell how great the Gain! Worldly wisdom knows nothing of that, or it would cease its boasting, and all its vain and unprofitable talk. Let us learn that Wisdom which is better than all the wisdom of this world, and we shall be fully satisfied with its rewards in God's good time.

In humbly *doing* God's Will, we may then confidently look for His help to enable us to *understand* it more fully. Now we may be sure, in the first place, that He wills that we should

use the powers of mind that He has already given us for this purpose. We use them constantly in the common affairs of every-day life; let us use them in the same way in our highest concerns. It is true that much of what we read in Holy Scripture is *beyond* our reason, and must be simply believed in, without being fully understood; but there is also much that we *may* understand by thinking upon it with an earnest intention of profiting, and it is clearly our duty to do this. If there are people who *mis-use* God's good gifts to them in their powers of mind, and others who allow them to lie *idle*, (unhappily we know that there are many of both classes,) let us endeavour all the more earnestly to *use them aright*, certain that in so doing we shall please Him Who gave them to us. In the Old as well as the New Testament, we may trace very clearly His Will on this point. (See Isaiah, i. 3; and St. Luke, xii. 54-57.) What sorrowful displeasure there is here called forth because God's people *would not 'consider!'* And yet, do not we—God's people in these later times—deserve the very same rebuke? How 'wise' we are sometimes in things of little or no real importance, and how blind and foolish when the question has to do with higher matters!

When we exercise our minds upon things of a lower kind, it is generally enough to give full *attention* to what we are thinking of; but, in

dwelling upon holy things, we must, besides this, remember the *reverence* due to them, as belonging in a more special manner to God. We need to be much reminded of this in these days, when the most sacred subjects are often treated as lightly as if there were indeed no difference between sacred and profane. 'Our God is a consuming fire.' In drawing near to Him, therefore, though as loving children, to learn His Will, let us not lose sight of 'reverence and godly fear.' So by His grace shall we best guard and retain our love itself. ■

Two other great rules must also be borne in mind, in our study of the Holy Bible.

I. We should read it so as to take in the *general sense* so far as we can, and not dwell upon certain *parts* alone which we may happen to like better, or think more important, than the rest. It may be that the parts which we slight contain the very truths which are most needful to us, so ignorant as we are concerning what is of real importance. We cannot tell; and we shall remember the warning given to us on this very point: 'Lean not unto thine own understanding.' Besides, the full meaning of each part cannot fully come out, unless it be taken along with the rest. The parts depend so much upon one another. The most grievous strifes and heresies have arisen in the Church through this partial and imperfect way of handling the Holy Scriptures. Let us therefore be

careful to study *the whole truth*, as it is there set forth.

II. In taking any *one* passage for consideration, the general meaning of which may be so clear as to leave little room for doubt or question about it, we must beware that we do not *limit* its meaning or application. Great truths which might be opened out to an *infinite* extent are often contained in a few short words. Can we not at once think of many such? When shall we come to an end of the thoughts arising out of this saying: 'GOD IS LOVE?' Never, throughout all eternity. And our Lord's command: 'BE YE THEREFORE PERFECT, EVEN AS YOUR FATHER WHICH IS IN HEAVEN IS PERFECT.' When shall we be able to satisfy ourselves that we have fulfilled that? Well might the Psalmist say: 'Thy commandment is exceeding broad.'

Our Church provides that the Old Testament (with a few exceptions) should be read through once every year, and the New Testament (with the exception of the Book of Revelation) three times. Besides this, many portions of the Holy Scriptures are repeated in the 'Epistles' and 'Gospels' for Sundays, &c. We shall do well to follow this plan, as nearly as we can, either at church or at home. But in private *study* it would be better not to read more than a small portion at a time. This exercise (as we said before) is different from reading or hearing, and should be

made a separate matter, unless we have only time for a very little reading, and choose to study it by the same opportunity. Each must do the best he can according to the circumstances in which he is placed. In our study we shall do well to use such *help* as we may gain from other books, such as commentaries, sermons, Scripture geography, &c. And we shall not neglect to pray for a blessing upon it, either in the words of the Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent, or in a shorter form, as the Psalmist's prayer: 'Lord, open Thou mine eyes, that I may see the wondrous things of Thy Law.'

Let us now consider, *What is that 'Holy Will' of God, and what are His 'Commandments,'* that we are bound to 'keep' and to 'walk in' all the days of our life? This great question might be answered in several forms: we will think of two in particular; the one, from the Old Testament, in the 'Ten Commandments;' the other, from the New Testament, in the two 'Gospel Commandments.' The Ten Commandments, as we know, are 'the same which God spake in the twentieth chapter of Exodus,' given from Mount Sinai to the children of Israel; the *two* Commandments are those which were given by our blessed Lord in answer to the question, 'Master, which is the great Commandment in the Law?' Each of these answers throws light upon the other. They are

the same, and yet different. The same in substance, but different in form.

‘The first and great Commandment’ in the Gospel teaches us our ‘Duty towards God.’ So also do the first four Commandments of the Old Testament. What is our ‘Duty towards God,’ as taught in these?

First, ‘To believe in Him, to fear Him, and to love Him.’

If we would do this—if we would believe in God, fear Him, and love Him as we ought—we must first learn to *know* Him. It is a common error amongst Christians to suppose that they *do* know God, and therefore to neglect to ‘acquaint themselves with Him,’ though all the while they are in much ignorance of Him, and of His ways. To ‘know’ God is not a mere work of the head, it is the work of the *heart*. In this it differs from common knowledge. As the *head* must be kept clear in order to gain knowledge of a lower kind, so must the *heart* be kept *pure from sin* if we would know God. We shall remember our Lord’s words in the Sermon on the Mount:—

‘The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!’

So far as we allow *any sinful habit* in ourselves, so far do we darken our hearts; for God, the only true Light, will not dwell with sin. Let us therefore pray, as well as strive, to be kept pure, that the light of God's Holy Spirit may shine in our hearts. Then may we hope to profit by our study of Him, in His Word, and in His Works; to know Him, and, knowing Him, to learn 'to believe in Him, to fear Him, and to love Him.' And in this 'study' we shall remember, as already said, that it is not *reading* alone, even of the Holy Bible, that will be of any use to us; we shall meditate also. We have heard of God's great works of Creation and Redemption from our earliest years, but these will have been little more than *words* to us, unless we have *thought* upon them. And they are not much more than words to too many amongst us, because we are so slow to exercise our minds in this way. If Christians were to make any real *study* of the works of *Creation alone*, they would find them wonderfully rich in high and beautiful thoughts—thoughts such as tend to enlarge and purify our souls, and lift them heavenward; and yet, with all we *may* know of the far surpassing riches of *Redemption* too, how cold and faithless, how weak and worldly, we still remain! Young Christians! there is a special call upon you to wipe off this reproach from us; for, with all the faults you know of in yourselves, with all the dulness of heart which

contact with worldliness may already have produced in you, your souls are more *free* to rise above the world, more in tune for heavenly thoughts and heavenly work, than the souls of those who have been longer under the power of evil, as it is always working in this miserable world. Use the precious gifts that yet remain to you, though all but lost to so many others, before they pass away from you too, and your work lies yet before you, to be done, if done at all, with lessened heart and hope, in sorrow and pain, instead of joyful love.

As we learn to *know* God, we cannot but learn to 'believe in Him, to fear Him, and to love Him' at the same time. Yet each of these great branches of our duty needs to be thought of apart from the rest. In our thoughts upon the Second Vow, we have already considered what it is to 'believe in' God. Let us now turn to the duty of 'fearing' Him. There is a *slavish* fear, which is *not* to be ours, such as that of the unprofitable servant in the parable, who only thought of his lord as 'an hard man.' Our fear will rather be that of the Psalmist, who says, 'There is mercy with Thee; therefore shalt Thou be feared:' a fear that 'enlarges' the heart, instead of closing it up. When we think of what our sins *deserve*, we may well fear His power to punish: this we are led to do; but as we learn to know Him better, our fear will not be of punishment, but rather of

grieving Him Who has so loved us. How could we bear to meet such love with ingratitude, with returns only of cold hearts and sinful lives? But we do not *yet* love God as we ought; we have not, as yet, perfectly, that sense of His love which would keep us from sin through the fear of grieving Him; still there is a 'godly fear' which must be ours, until the higher and better feeling takes its place. There is the greater need to consider this, as it is so generally lost sight of in these days, to the grievous hurt of all who so neglect it. The enemy of mankind, always on the watch to bring evil upon us, has lulled Christians in general into a belief that this 'godly fear' is not a necessary part of their religion. And our natural love of ease tends the same way. Even amongst those who think seriously, too many set aside 'the fear of God,' putting 'love' in its place. But wherever this is done, love itself is not as it ought to be. There can be no true religion without the 'fear' of God. This we are taught in many of the plainest texts of Holy Scripture. (See Psalm ii. 11; cxi. 10. Proverbs, xiv. 27. St. Luke, xii. 4, 5. Phil. ii. 12.) We know that He is not only good, full of mercy and loving-kindness, but that He is also *Just*. And though it is true that He is 'most willing to pardon us if we come unto Him with faithful repentance,' we may not expect our sins to be passed over without punishment of some

kind. Our Lord has indeed paid our *great* debt—He has suffered for us that heavy wrath of God which would have crushed us utterly; but we *need* some correction, and may look for it in this world, that our souls may ‘be saved in the day of the Lord.’ When we read of the punishment that was sent upon His people of old—even such holy men as Moses and David—can we hope to escape without it? Can we suppose that we are better than they were, or that we stand less in need of correction? If not, ‘let us *fear*.’

We will now turn to think of that part of our duty which speaks of the *love* we owe to God. When we dwell—even for a short time only—on what He has done, and is continually doing for us, of the mercies He *showers* upon us of both a higher and lower kind, that in Him ‘we live, and move, and have our being’ every day, that from Him alone comes every good thing we have, or hope for; when we think more especially of His great Gift to us in His Only Son, our ever-blessed Lord and Saviour, to live and to die for us—our wonder is that *this* duty, the duty of *loving* Him Who has so loved us, should ever be neglected—that it should not be more entirely *natural* to us, sinful as we are. And yet we cannot glance at our own hearts, and our daily ways of going on, without seeing how grievously faulty we are even in this matter. We cannot help seeing *coldness* and *ingratitude* where there should be the con-

tinual rising up of fervent and grateful love. If we were to try to count up all God's mercies to us, we should find them 'more in number than the sand,' we should far sooner tire of reckoning them up than He would of bestowing them upon us. 'His compassions fail not, they are new every morning.' In the abundance of our blessings, why should we be so slow to think of Him Who is the Giver of them all, so slow even to *thank* Him, so negligent to make any return for them? He has given us *hearts* to love Him, and we know what it is to love—we *do* love those who are kind to us amongst our fellow-creatures. And yet, what have our kindest and dearest friends done for us compared with what God has done, and is doing continually? What is their love compared with His? Did He not give us these very friends, with all their love, and every other good thing we have, besides? How is it, then, that we do not *delight* in loving Him, and doing His Will?

It is because our great *Enemy* has come between us and our good God. Satan hides His goodness from us, and blinds our eyes, so that we shall not be able to see it. He turns our hearts away from God, and leads us to sin against Him, and so this great Darkness falls upon our hearts. And when we have sinned, and brought down upon ourselves the just anger of God, our Enemy leads us to think that He is a *hard* Master for punishing us

as we deserve. We live in a rebellious world, we carry about with us a rebellious nature, and we are subject to the continual temptations of the great rebel against God—our spiritual Enemy—Satan. And so it is that, even with His bountiful gifts all around us, we know Him not. Yet even in this state of blindness His mercy follows us. He can open our eyes; and He will do so if we will use the means which He has given us of helping ourselves.

Let us do this; let us seek earnestly to know Him, and, knowing Him, ‘to love Him, with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength.’

Now, let us not repeat these words merely as a matter of course—let us think about them. They show us *how* to love God—they show us what our love to Him is to be. Do we think that we know already, though confessing that we come far short in practice? From the talk, as well as from the lives, of Christians in general, it would appear that there were very few amongst us who even *understood* this duty of love. Small indeed is the number of those who seek in earnest to fulfil it. We shall not suppose that we are so much wiser and better than others, as to be sure of being right, without looking more closely into our duty than is commonly done. If the other truths of Holy Scripture require to be studied if we would rightly understand them—this great duty must surely do so.

When we think of 'love,' we think of that happy feeling which rises up in our hearts when we see or think of those who are kind to us, or so good in themselves, that we cannot, as we say, *help* loving them. This feeling is itself the gift of God—one of His highest and best gifts—and it shows us, in part, what our love should be towards Himself; but the *duty* of love goes far beyond this. It is not a mere *feeling*, however good or happy—like a flame, kindled hastily, which is liable to die out at any moment—it is a *steady glow* of heat, carefully tended, and kept up by the continual addition of fresh fuel. Here is a figure: will it not help us to a further understanding of this great matter? What does the *fuel* show us? Is it not that (whether wood or coal) which would be useful in no other way? Let us liken it to *our natural wills*, which can only serve God by being given up to Him, and made to work out His purposes, to fulfil *His Will*, and to be filled with His Love.

And so again we are led to *self-denial*. No love can indeed be worth anything which is not grounded in that; and if this be so, even in the love we owe to each other, (as we shall see more fully afterwards,) how much more in our love to God? This it is to love Him, not only with 'heart and mind,' but 'with *soul and strength*.' It *needs more than human* strength to give up one's own will and liking to do or suffer the Will

and pleasure of God ; and he who can do that perfectly has power to do anything.

This is the love that was shown by Abraham when he left his country and his friends, and when he offered up his son Isaac in obedience to the commands of God ; by Moses, when he chose ‘ rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season ;’ and by all the prophets, apostles, and holy men of old, who chose to serve God, and do His Will, rather than to enjoy this present world, leading heavenly lives on earth, and trusting in that higher Love, which would make Death itself a gain to them. And when we look to the *highest* Pattern of all, do we not see the same thing ? Are we not taught the same great lesson of self-denying obedience, though far more perfect, in the life and in the death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ?

In all this we see what *our love* to God should be. It must be as real, and must show itself to be real in the same way. It may not indeed appear likely at present that we should be called upon to do and suffer the same things as the saints and martyrs of old ; but we cannot tell how even this may be, or what great trials may yet be in store for us. And it is certain that, unless we are *prepared* to suffer the loss of all things, for the sake of Him Who gave Himself for us, we have no ground to hope that we shall

be accepted by Him at the last. And there is no other way of preparing ourselves for *great* trials but by daily obedience—daily self-denial—in *small* things.

The rest of our 'Duty towards God' hangs upon this 'love' of Him which we have just been considering. 'To worship Him, to give Him thanks, to put our whole trust in Him, to call upon Him, to honour His Holy Name and His Word, and to serve Him truly all the days of our life.' If we truly *love* God, we shall do all these. On the other hand, if we do these things, we show that we do indeed love Him.

Let us look into each of them one by one, to see how this is, and what they require of us. 'To worship Him.'—What is meant by this? Not *merely* going to church, saying our prayers, or singing hymns. (How many come short even of this!) We cannot indeed worship as we ought to do *without* doing all these; but is not much *more* required of us? Our Blessed Lord's own words teach us very plainly on this point. 'God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him *in spirit and in truth*.' 'The Father seeketh such to worship Him.' Each of us may well ask himself: Am I amongst those 'true worshippers' who are *found* of Him? Do I indeed worship God 'in spirit and in truth?' The word 'seeketh' seems to show that such worshippers are few, and a very little thought leads us to fear

that we may not be amongst them. And yet the words which point out the difference between 'true worshippers' and others, are such as even a very young Christian may understand, so far as to learn from them the right way. 'In spirit and in truth.'—Is not this *sincerely, earnestly, with all our hearts*? This is not hard to *understand*, though it may not be the way in which Christians usually worship. It is indeed very plain; but it is not easy to *practise*, for in its fullest sense it is nothing less than the *giving up of ourselves to God*. And this is *the work of a life*. But faulty though we may know ourselves to be, we hope to learn even this in time. We know that 'by God's Help' we *can* do so. Let us think then how we should worship, *if we were in earnest*.

In the first place, if sincere, shall we not endeavour to put away all worldly thoughts, and to give *our whole attention* to the great business we are engaged in? And so, when we *confess our sins*, we shall *call them to mind*, (we cannot in *public* worship think of them, *in particular*, as in our private prayers, but even then we shall remember some of them;) we shall feel really humble and grieved to have committed them; and when we pray for pardon, we shall do so with real desire, from a feeling that we *need* it. When we receive *Absolution*, we shall humbly and thankfully take it to ourselves, feeling that we can then join more heartily in the service of prayer and

praise that follows. When we *pray*, we shall send our *hearts* along with every petition offered in words, believing that we shall be heard, and that we shall have what we ask for, according to our Lord's gracious promise. When we join in singing *praise*, we shall not do so as if idly enjoying the singing of good words to music that we like : it will be with a *solemn* as well as a happy feeling that we are engaged in the highest work we can ever have to do—not on earth merely, but even in Heaven itself ; that we are joining with saints and angels in hymns to God—the great God of Heaven and earth. And when we hear the *reading of His Holy Word*, we shall pay the most reverent attention to it, as spoken by Him to ourselves. In so giving our *hearts* to the work of worship, we shall not neglect to offer the service of the *body* too—kneeling in prayer, standing for praise, bowing at the mention of the Holy Name, and joining with our voices where it is proper to do so. *

Such devout behaviour as this will be seen in all 'true worshippers;' and so far as any of us

* Those who would wish to praise God *worthily*, with both heart and voice, will do their best *out of Church* to prepare themselves for this great work, by using all such opportunities as may be had of *learning to sing*, taking the part that best suits their natural voice, if possible. It is *very* sad that there should be so much neglect on this point as there is, though it may be hoped that a better spirit is rising up amongst us.

come short of it, we must fear that we do *not* 'worship in spirit and in truth.' Perhaps there is nothing which shows the *general want of faith and earnestness* amongst Christians *more* than the careless way in which most of us are content to worship—unless it be the grievous neglect of that which is the crowning act of all sacred services—the Holy Communion itself.

All this would be *shocking* to us, if we were not so much used to it. And when we think of it—when we see what worship ought to be, and compare it with what it is—it may well make us sad. Even the heathen might shame us for our want of zeal; for they are at least *in earnest* in their blind and false worship. It was not so in the early ages of the Church. Then the faith of Christians—that strong sense of the *reality* of the great Truths they held—led them to worship with heart and soul—'in spirit and in truth.' And so it is now, where there are congregations of converts from heathenism to Christianity. It is well for these that they are out of the reach of the chilling influence of our example—shame to us that it should be so! *

* In the earlier ages of the Church, Christians knew how to take their part in worship without the help of books—many of them being able to repeat the whole Book of Psalms by heart. If we, in the nineteenth century, cannot do without such help, let us at least be *learning* to be less dependent on it. In those parts of the services which are

Among those who see something of this sad fault in us, and wish to do better, complaint is often made of 'wandering thoughts.' People grieve about them, but fail to strive against them in an effectual way. They think too much of the 'weakness of the flesh,' and too little of the strength which is promised to all those who ask for it, as well as that which is already given. Much may be done by earnest attempts to fix our attention while we are engaged in acts of worship—much more than most people seem to think; but this is not the only way we have of helping ourselves. It is perhaps *chiefly* in our other work, of a lower kind—in what we do, apart from acts of direct worship, all day long—that we may gain the power we want. Those who look upon Religion as belonging only to Sundays, and other such special times, will of course find it a difficult thing to give their minds wholly to it then—indeed, it will not be possible to do so; but to all who make it a real business—every day, 'worship' will become natural.

When our thoughts wander from their proper

familiar to us from constant use, as well as in the lessons which are read to us, we shall indeed find it may be better to lay aside our books, as we can pay fuller attention with closed eyes than in following the words; and it is more seemly reverently to fold the hands, than to use them in holding a book. But each must judge for himself in a matter of this kind, as we are not all alike.

business in holy services, it shows that that business is neglected at other times—that when we work, we do not work *for God*. If our every-day thoughts were indeed bent on pleasing Him in all we did or said, our minds would not ‘wander’ from Him when we were offering our *best* service: they would then be most lively and earnest. And so they would best secure *farther* help and strength.

The ‘giving God thanks,’ and ‘calling upon Him,’ are parts of the duty of ‘worship,’ which we have just been considering, but each of them may well be thought of by itself.—‘To give Him thanks.’ We know that we do indeed *owe* Him more thanks than we can ever pay, for all His abundant and never-ceasing mercies to us. Our *chief* blessings are summed up in the ‘General Thanksgiving’ in our Prayer-Books, where we say, ‘We bless Thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but, above all, for Thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world through our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.’ All these mercies are, indeed, great beyond the power of our thought; and this is what we feel, as we follow the Minister when he says these words. We feel that we can but send up our hearts in silent love and adoration, without hoping to realize the greatness of the blessings we are giving thanks for. We can never hope fully to

understand it, in this world ; but, even now, we may gain many steps towards doing so. If we would give thanks—not idly—but with full and earnest hearts, we must fill our hearts beforehand with a lively sense of the blessings we acknowledge, by calling them to mind, reckoning them over, and learning what they are. We do not even *know* our blessings, even those of a lower kind, as we might do, because we do not study them. The blessings of '*creation*,' how little we know even of them ! But though we cannot know *much*, even the most learned amongst us, we ought continually to endeavour to be learning *something*, as well as to remind ourselves of what we already know.

We may feel this to be an unwelcome *task* at first ; for our past slothfulness we deserve that it should be so, but our gain in it will be great as we go on, greater far than we can possibly know until we have made an earnest attempt. We may learn much from books, but far more than we might imagine from simply *observing and thinking* for ourselves. The best course to follow, is to think of the *lower* works of creation first, going *upwards* till we come to the highest, considering the *nature* of each class, so far as we can know it, and noticing in what respects they are *alike*, and how they *differ* from each other, becoming more and more perfect as we go higher ; also, to think of the *uses* of everything. In this way, we shall

gain some true (though imperfect) ideas of *what we are* as compared with the lower creatures, and of what we might be, and might do, if we used the wonderful powers given to us in the service of our Maker. The thoughts coming to us in this way are such as could not but raise and purify our minds very greatly, if we will only follow them up. And yet we have spoken only of the blessings of 'creation.' Meditating upon them will not only be good for us in itself, but *followed* by solemn thoughts on the Fall, and the history of man after that, it will best prepare us for thinking of the higher mercies shown to us in 'Redemption.' We need something to prepare us for meditation on that. Without this we cannot duly estimate or fully feel its greatness. The want of this preparation of mind is one, and a considerable, reason why the exceeding mercy of God, even in Redemption, has so little effect in stirring up our minds, or warming our hearts. To many many Christians, it is little more than the sound of so many *words* that they hear when this mercy is spoken of. Many know this, and lament it, but very few take proper means to make their hearts more soft and tender.

Then, besides all these great things, we have each of us our own *particular* mercies to remember and be thankful for, beginning from our birth, and shown to us continually up to the present time. These, again, we shall not be properly

sensible of, unless we take pains to make ourselves so, by calling them all carefully to mind, so far as we can recollect them. This we shall not attempt at any one time, but it will be our aim to do it by degrees, according to our opportunities. We ought not to be forgetful, either, of the great mercies which have been shown from time to time towards our Church and nation, such as we read in History. If God's People of old found constant cause for thankfulness in the Goodness shown towards themselves in this way, 'calling to mind His wonders of old time,' as we know they did, how much greater reason have *we* to do this, as Christians!

In reckoning over God's mercies to us, we learn how to be thankful for them. And we learn at the same time how to *trust Him for more*. We cannot doubt that He Who has so showered His best blessings upon us in past time, will be with us in time to come; He has given us 'all things needful' hitherto, and has promised to continue His favour towards us if we stay upon Him: we may feel sure that He will keep His gracious Promise; for 'Did ever any trust in the Lord, and was confounded? or did any abide in His fear, and was forsaken? or whom did He ever despise, that called upon Him?'

And, again, it is because Christians do *not* so dwell upon the Goodness of God shown in past times, that they find it *hard* to put their 'whole

trust in Him' for the time to come. They do not lay the proper *foundation* for this full trust, and so cannot *build* upon it in thinking of what is to come, though they may sincerely wish to do so. What, indeed, could be happier for us all than to be able to feel sure that we were always in the Hands of a loving and merciful Father, Who would care for us as His dear children, and order everything for the best, bringing good even out of evil itself?

We cannot hope to be altogether free from sorrow of *some* kind as long as we live in this imperfect state; but we might save ourselves a world of trouble if we could really trust God in this way. What is it that wears so many people's lives out, and often brings them 'with sorrow to the grave' before the natural time, but the cares and anxieties continually pressing upon them? And what do cares and anxieties come from? Not the thought merely of *labour*, hard work to be done, or trouble of other kinds, but *uncertainty* how labour may turn out, what will be *gained* by all that is done. Now this, at least, might be saved, if all were simply and indeed left in the Hands of God, as *trusting* that He knew and cared for it, for our sakes, and that He would certainly *do right*, and show His Love to us in everything, even in such *sorrows* as He might see fit to bring upon us. How much comfort and happiness we miss so far as we fall short of this

perfect trust! And yet it is to be feared that there are very few amongst us who understand what it is. Or why is it that we give way so *easily* to feelings of vexation, and are so soon provoked when anything happens contrary to our natural liking? Why are we so much troubled about *losses* or disappointments of other kinds? And why is it that, even when we are *reminded* of God's purposes of mercy in all these things, we feel as if we could not take the words to ourselves, or believe that they were indeed meant for us? This need not be, and ought not to be. We confess that we are *weak*; if we *mean* this, why do we not more earnestly and trustfully lay hold of the Strength and the Wisdom which will supply all we want? The answer is, Because—though we *profess* to look to this as our stay and guidance, and though we say 'God is good,' we do, in fact, trust *in ourselves*, and think that we can secure happiness in our own way—better than He would do it for us in *His* way. We trust neither His Wisdom nor His Love. We feel sure that we know *what happiness is*, and that we know *the best way of obtaining it* for ourselves. Then, if our plans are crossed (as they so often are, in mercy, to *show* us our weakness and folly) we are fretful and disposed to repine. We are wrong both ways. For none but those who have learnt to *rest* on the Love and Wisdom of God do *know* what real happiness is. It is not the *pleasing of*

ourselves, as people generally think ; it is something coming from God, who gives it *only* where room is made in the heart for Him and His Gifts. And therefore, *all attempts to make our own happiness must fail*, sooner or later. We *cannot* be happy, excepting in God's way—by giving up our hearts to Him.

Let us learn to do this, and place our 'whole trust' in our merciful, wise, and loving Father. We know that His way will take us through a 'strait gate,' and we may not expect that our path will be a smooth one, but it is *safe*, and it is blessed beyond all our hopes and desires in its *End*.

—'To call upon' God. In other words, to *pray* to Him. Let us think what 'Prayer' is. As in Praise, and Thanksgiving, it is *speaking to God*. In giving thanks and praise, we think of His past mercies to us—in Prayer, we look to Him for more. Bountiful as He has been to us already, He knows the desires that will often arise in our hearts, and would have us look to Him to have them satisfied. See Jeremiah, xxix. 12, 13. Psalm cxlv. 18, 19. Isaiah, lxxv. 24. James, i. 5 ; and v. 15, 16. St. Matt. vii. 7–11 ; and xxi. 22. St. Mark, xi. 24. St. John, xiv. 13, 14. &c.

When we think upon such words as these, (so often repeated in Holy Scripture) and especially upon those of our Blessed Lord Himself, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask in Prayer, believing, ye shall

receive,' and then look round, and see the misery and discontent that there is in the world, we may wonder that these things should be so. Do we not all wish, not that we might have good things for ourselves only, but, that others might have them too?—that all sin should be put away—that justice should be done in all the world—that we should all learn to love each other—that there should be 'no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying,' nor 'any more pain?' *So we pray that it may be* whenever we say the Prayer which our Lord Himself has taught us. When His Kingdom is indeed come, and when His Will is done in earth as it is in Heaven, then the reign of Evil will have come to an end, and 'sorrow and sighing shall flee away.' O what a thought it is for us that our poor prayers may indeed avail to hasten the coming of that time! But can it be so? Is it not too great a thing to hope for? Let us look to the promise.

'What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, AND YE SHALL HAVE THEM.'

These are our Lord's own words. And they are plain—we cannot mistake their meaning. Yes, it is so. *If we can believe*; 'all things are possible to him that believeth.' Our prayers *may* avail to hasten the coming of God's Kingdom. But that blessed time seems yet to be a long way off; Evil not only keeps its ground in the world, but spreads,

and grows, and strengthens, while Good seems to make its way slowly. And this, though Christians continue to pray 'Thy Kingdom come,' as their Lord has taught them to do. How is it? Has the Enemy so much power to prevent what God and man desire?—or is it that our prayers are weak, that we do not pray *in faith*? When we say the Lord's Prayer, is it with a solemn feeling that our Father in Heaven hears us, and that He will surely *give us what we ask for*?

We are, indeed, faint-hearted in prayer. We cannot pray in faith, because we feel that we do not, after all, care for the *best* things as we ought to do. Though we pray for them, we know that our hearts are really set much more earnestly upon things of a lower kind, such as our Heavenly Father may not see fit to give us. We dare not pray for these, and we have no heart in praying for the others. And so we lose both. But let us not be content to go on in this way, praying without either faith or hope; let us rather strive to raise our souls above all desires of a doubtful kind, and learn to fix them upon such things as we know are in accordance with God's Will; and then, whatever we pray for, we may trust to be heard, for we can pray *in faith*. Let us take these things in the order in which our Lord has set them before us, and trust His promise that we shall be no losers. 'Seek ye first the King-

dom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.'

We need not doubt but that He who made us as we are, in body and soul, and Who is for ever giving us proofs of His tender care and love, wills that we should be *perfectly* happy—that we should enjoy all the good that we naturally long for. And therefore, while we endeavour to 'set our affections on things above,' and to be 'careful' (that is, anxious) 'for nothing' of a lower kind, we may ask our Heavenly Father for anything that we wish, so that it be in submission to His Will. And we need not fear that our prayers are not heard because they are not always answered as we wish. Perhaps the thing we ask for is not really good for us, or God is trying our faith and trust by keeping us *waiting* for it awhile. If we are doing what He would have us do, we may be quite certain that He hears us with favour; and though He may not grant us the thing we wish for, He will most assuredly give us something *better* in its stead—something which we ourselves shall know and feel to be better, when it comes. Our Heavenly Father does not disappoint His loving and obedient children. He gives us 'more than either we desire or deserve.' Let us trust Him *fully*, remembering, with thankfulness, His past mercies to us, and looking with humble confidence for more.

It is not well for beginners—if for anybody—to ‘make long prayers,’ or use many *words* in prayer. Let us remember what our Lord says on this point—that ‘our Father knows what things we have need of before we ask Him.’ The chief thing in Prayer is *the offering up of the earnest wishes of our hearts*, leaving them with Him, to be granted in the way He sees best.

Now this may be done in few *words*—almost *without* words when we are praying in private. Let us only take care that our *hearts* are in the work, whether our words be few or many. And those who pray in faith, or wish to do so more perfectly, will be *reverent* in manner, as well as earnest. They will have the fear of God before their eyes, and beware of being ‘hasty to utter anything before’ Him.

We shall not pray *seldom*er than twice a day—it is well for those who can to add a noonday prayer—but we ought to strive to be *always* in such a frame of mind as would be suitable to the act; so that, whenever occasion calls for it, (which will be often, if we make our work, as Christians, a real one,) we can lift up our hearts to God in some short form of prayer—such as a verse from the Psalms, or only, ‘Lord, help me;’ ‘Be Thou my Guide,’ &c. It is best to spend at least as much time in *preparation* for prayer as in prayer itself, when we have time for serious thought. We shall ‘call upon’ God

earnestly, reverently, and often ; but above all, shall remember that the great thing is to *secure a hearing* for our prayers. We know how this may be done, though too many of us forget it.

‘ We know that God heareth not sinners : but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth His Will, him He heareth.’

—‘ To honour His Holy Name and His Word.’—This is what we pray that all people may do when we say, ‘ Hallowed be Thy Name.’ And how may that ever-blessed Name be honoured or hallowed by us ? A full answer to this would lead us on through the whole of Christian Faith and Duty. We honour God’s ‘ Holy Name and His Word,’ first, by paying them all due and lowly reverence in our *manner* with regard to them. When we speak of them, by doing it with care and gravity, as those who love and fear God Himself—bowing at the Blessed Name of Jesus in particular, as that by which our Lord was known among men when on earth—the Name in which we feel Him to be *nearest* to us, sinners as we are—the ‘ Name which is above every name.’

We honour the Holy ‘ Word ’ of God by outward respect to the blessed Book in which it is contained, by handling it reverently and tenderly, and paying ‘ earnest heed ’ to all that it says to us, as indeed coming from Him. God’s people of old—the Jews—whose example may serve us too often in the way of *warning*, in *this* matter set us

a pattern of behaviour which we should do well to follow. Though they failed to honour God in the *best* way, by obeying Him, they were careful about reverence of manner in making mention of the Holy Name, in any of its forms.*

The more we know of our great and good God, the more shall we reverence as well as love Him. It is no sign, either of love or of knowledge, to treat His Holy Name or His Word with that easy familiarity which may sometimes be seen even in people who profess to be religious. The pure and holy Angels veil their faces before the Majesty of God ; and shall we, defiled as we are by sin and worldliness, approach Him with less care—with rudeness and thoughtlessness? Rather let us 'honour His Holy Name and His Word' by our own manner, and lead others to do the same, to the utmost of our power.

There is a far *wider* sense in which we may do this. That Holy Name is named *upon us*, as Christians—'members of Christ ;'—we bear it

* And in this—to our shame!—we may also learn a lesson from even the followers of the false prophet, Mahomet—those whom we pray for, as 'Turks,' in the third Collect for Good Friday. Though they do not believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, and pay Him no honour, as God, they profess to worship one God ; and in their worship are devout in manner. They pay reverence to the Holy Name in other ways too—as in the care that they take to preserve from defilement even the paper on which It may be written.

about with us every day, and all day long, and either honour or dishonour it *by everything that we do*. We honour it by denying our own lusts, and living to God—living as Christ our Saviour did when on earth—doing the things He would have us do—‘bearing much fruit,’ according to His own words. We dishonour it by living to ourselves and for ‘this present world,’ neglecting the work which it calls us to, and falling under the temptations of the Evil one. We are led by the ways of the thoughtless world around us to think lightly of the value of time, and even of life itself, excepting so far as it may be used to gain some worldly end; but how can we think of it with any other than very solemn feelings, when we remember that it may be so used, in every moment of it, as to promote God’s honour and glory? Who can tell the blessedness of those who can look back upon a life so spent; or on the other hand, the misery and shame which must one day overwhelm all such as have *wasted* their precious lives and opportunities, and not only so, but brought actual dishonour upon ‘that worthy Name by the which they are called?’

We come now to think of this—the *service* we owe Almighty God—in a more special manner. We say (lastly) that it is our duty ‘to serve Him truly all the days of our life.’ We have thought of ourselves as His *children*; we must remember, also, that we are His *servants*. He has *work* for

us to do, and expects that we shall do it. In His Almighty Power He could do all that He sees good without any help from us; He does not *need* our assistance; and yet *He wills that we should work for Him, and with Him.* He calls us to be His fellow-workers. And to that end He has furnished us with powers fitted to what we are called to do. He has not made us mere *machines*, to be *worked upon*; He has given us power to think and act and choose for ourselves. We may neglect to use this power, or we may use it amiss; but it is ours, nevertheless.

Now what is the Work that God would have done in the world, besides that which is always going on, in His providential care for us all?

We see that the first beautiful order of things has been disturbed, by the evil which came in at the Fall, when the first man and the first woman committed sin, and brought death into the world. That evil has ever since been spreading ruin and misery amongst mankind. It came to its height in the Crucifixion of our Lord by the very men whom He came to save, but did not cease to work its way, and to make havoc amongst God's best creatures, even after that awful event. Our Lord and Saviour has paid the *penalty* of sin for us, yet Sin itself is not subdued in the world. Millions of those for whom Christ died have never even heard His blessed Name; and many even amongst those who call themselves His followers,

are in a state of grievous bondage to Sin and Satan.

What, then, is the new Work that the Good God would now have done in the world, but *the turning of all men to Himself*, and their being restored to His Image, which was lost at the Fall—that they should leave their sins, and become holy and happy, as at the first—that they should be freed from the service of their cruel enemy, and learn to love and obey their God and Lord? This is, indeed, God's great Work in these latter days; the Work that He would have done in the world before He comes to Judgment; the Work that our Lord set before His Apostles when He was about to leave them, and to return to His Glory; the Work that all His true Saints and Servants have given themselves to, ever since that time, during their short day upon the earth.

It is the special Work of the Third Person in the Blessed Trinity, the Holy Ghost. And He deigns to make use of us, as His instruments, in doing it. He works *in* us, and *through* us upon others. He helps *each* of us according to our needs, and He pours His gifts of Grace upon the Church, to which we *all* belong. His Work is our Work; that to which we are called to attend to above all others in this world. Great as it is, we can never say that it is beyond our strength, for we may always obtain the grace we need by praying for it in faith. And, great as it is, it does

not interfere with the daily needs, and the work of a lower kind, which continually press upon us, for it is done, in great part, *through* them. Both come from God,—the Heavenly and the earthly duties; and He has so ordered it, that they shall not clash, but, on the contrary, help out each other. This we shall find, if we work wisely, following the guidance of His Holy Spirit, while we use the powers of mind which have been given us.

To work *wisely*, in humble dependence upon God's Grace, this is indeed the way to succeed in our great Work. Zeal is good, but it is not enough by itself. Neither is it enough to *think* for ourselves, without looking to a Higher Wisdom than our own. We must not only set ourselves to do God's Work, but we must do it *in His Way*. It is because Christians have not thought enough about this, that that Work has not hitherto prospered in the world as it ought to have done. They have not been without earnest *wishes* to do it, but they have trusted too much to their own sense of right and wrong, and so have failed. They have too hastily taken for granted that their own feelings and notions were a sufficient guide, without looking enough *to God*, and to the teaching of His Holy Spirit.

His Ways are not as our ways, nor His Thoughts as our thoughts; and if we do not seek to know them, and humbly follow where they lead us, we cannot do His Work as we ought to do it. We

are naturally apt to look for '*great things*,' in the *means* which are to be used, as well as the *end* which is to be gained by them; but God works by means of '*things which are despised*,' and persons who are little thought of by the world. He chooses '*the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty*.' His '*strength is made perfect in weakness*.' *This is His Rule*—we learn it from the Holy Bible, and we may see it for ourselves in Nature, as well as in His way of dealing with men now. Are we not told, also, not to mind '*high things*,' not to be '*high-minded*,' but to fear, to be '*humble*,' '*poor in spirit*,' teachable, and child-like? All this agrees perfectly together, as everything coming from Divine Wisdom must do; and yet it is generally overlooked. And so God's Work in the world, so far as it depends upon man, suffers loss. Let us learn His Way better. Why may we not hope that He will use us to work out His high Purposes, weak and unworthy as we are, if we truly resign ourselves to Him—if we give ourselves up wholly into His Hands, to do and suffer *what He wills*?

It may be, in God's Providence, that our daily duties are of a very lowly kind—such as concern the body rather than the soul, and seem to belong to this world rather than the world to come. So it is in most cases. If we had had to choose for

ourselves, we might have decided otherwise. We might have chosen a lot in which there would have been fuller opportunities of doing God's own special work—such as preaching the Gospel to the heathen, or stirring up the hearts of our brethren at home. If we could have such work, we might even feel that we could go through opposition, or persecution, in doing it, and that with joy. This is natural. But let us remember that all these things are indeed ordered by God; that it is by no mere chance that we are placed where we are, with our lowly tasks before us; but that He has Himself so arranged it, knowing fully what is best for us, as well as what will most promote His Honour and Glory. We are ready to confess ourselves *unworthy* to work for God, but perhaps we are less *fit* also to do His Work than we may imagine. Fitness for that does not come by nature, in any of us; neither can it reasonably be hoped for, until after a course of training—perhaps a long and painful one. We see this in worldly matters; he who would be master of any trade or profession, must give much time and pains to learn it first, or he would fail miserably when he came to depend upon it for a living. And can we think that *God's* Work requires less care and pains in the training for it? Surely it calls for far *greater* efforts than any worldly business can do. We do not see or feel this, only because it has to do with the *soul*, and the workings of that are hidden from

us. Skill of hand or head we can understand better. In His Love and Wisdom, God has so fitted together things high and low in the world around us, as to give us through our common daily tasks the very training we need for the highest work—the training in *moral* qualities which we are now thinking of. If we can go through all the little trials that we meet with in doing our *lowly* duties without losing temper or patience, we may hope to be fitted for something higher; but if we find that *these* are too much for us—that we become impatient, or discontented, with only *small* provocations, we may be quite sure that we are not yet ready for higher things, nor worthy of them.

But on the other hand, when we remember that *it is God's work* that we are doing, we shall *do our best* in our common daily tasks, of whatever kind they may be. We shall think nothing beneath us that comes before us as a duty, however lowly, for it is something that *He would have us do*, and that gives it worth and dignity. For this reason, we shall be careful to learn all *good habits*—such as are too often slighted even by religious persons, though they are not without value in ‘the world.’ Such are—diligence, punctuality, method, and general exactness, both in word and deed. A good Christian will not be content to fail in any of these. If not learnt already, he will set himself to acquire them, at whatever cost of labour or

self-denial. It is part of the service he owes to his Master in Heaven.

This leads us to thoughts of our duty to our *neighbour*, which is but a part of our duty to God. Let us make a careful study of it; for in learning it, and doing it, we shall indeed 'serve Him truly.' And then, the *great* work which we have been setting before ourselves as our highest aim will follow, in God's good time, His Spirit working with us and in us, causing us, while we are fruitful in every good work, to increase also in the knowledge of God.

Our duty towards our '*neighbour*,' as set forth at length in the Catechism, is collected from the last six of the Ten Commandments, and other parts of Holy Scripture. But the whole of it is really contained in the first sentence of the answer in the Catechism, as our Lord has taught us in the second 'Gospel Commandment.' We shall see this, when we think upon it, and consider what it is.

'My duty towards my neighbour is to love him as myself, and to do to all men as I would they should do unto me.'

Let us think, first, *who is meant* by our '*neighbour*;' and then, of the *duty of* '*love*' that we owe to him.

'Who is my neighbour?'—We know that this question was asked of our Lord Himself, Who

answered it by showing that *any one to whom we may do good* is a neighbour to us. Now, who is there, amongst all the millions of our fellow-men now living in the world, that we may not do some good to, if we wish it? We may think of those far away—on the other side of the world, whom we are never likely to see, nor they to see us; are not these quite out of our reach? Let us think of our *friends*; are we not parted in the same way from some of them? They, too, are beyond sight and hearing; but yet we can reach them in some ways, and sad it would be for us to think that we could not—that we were indeed quite cut off from each other. Though we cannot see or speak to them, we can send messages of love to them, we can show that we care for them by kind words which will cheer them, or by sending them such help as they may need and we can spare for them; or, if we were indeed cut off from doing them good in all other ways, there is *one* way of reaching them left, which is always open to us—prayer. What good is there that we may *not* do to others in this way, *if* we but pray in faith? (*Without* faith, of course even our prayers would be of no avail.) Now, by such means as these, and especially by *prayer*, we may show love *to all*. Is it not so? Everybody in the world, then, is a 'neighbour' to us; and all, as neighbours, are to be loved.

We may have known this, and said it in words,

before; but surely we come very far short of making it a *real thing* to ourselves. We speak of some (even of those *near* to us—our fellow-countrymen, and fellow-Christians,) as ‘strangers;’—of others, as people we ‘do not like,’ or ‘care for.’ Is this right? Does it look as if we remembered that all were our ‘neighbours?’ It is indeed natural and right to like some people more than others—those who are good and kind more than those who show a lack of love; and there is a sense in which even good people may be ‘strangers’ to us, when we do not know them personally. But we are apt to *rest* in such thoughts as these about other people—to think of them as strangers, or those with whom we have no concern—and *nothing more*. So far as we do this, we must see ourselves to be wrong. It may be that those whom, as we loosely say, we do not like or care for, we owe a *special* duty of love to. It may be that it is in our power to do them some great good which we do not know of now, or think of as likely. We shall return to this by-and-by. We see enough now, at all events, to make us careful how we speak of others, or behave towards them—since *all*—whether they are to be liked for their own sakes or not, are indeed our ‘neighbours,’ and may, one day, be much *more* to us.

This wide duty of love is one which is easier to you, the young ones of Christ’s Flock, than it is to those who are older, (unless they have made a

life-study of it;) do you not feel that it is almost *natural* to you that there is something *delightful* in the thought of it, if we could but all agree to carry it out fully? And can we not all see that we should then indeed be far *happier* than we are, apart from any thought of *duty*? It is indeed natural to us to love—natural, that is, to our *better selves*. How should it be otherwise? We were made ‘in the Image of God;’ and ‘God is Love.’ And though, through the Fall, we have lost much of this likeness to Him, yet it is not wholly destroyed in us, and those of us who have been made His children in Baptism may regain it entirely.

Through the grace given to us, we may learn to love as we ought. Let us *use* this precious help while we may; and by it keep our hearts soft, and tender, and loving towards all. Else they will close up, and we shall become selfish and narrow-minded, ‘even as others.’ Selfishness is indeed the rule of the world—the ‘cold’ world, as it is well called. In this we see plainly the work of the Enemy, who has come in between our good God and ourselves. He it is who has also come in amongst us, and (*formed as we are for love,*) made us ‘strangers’ to each other, cooled love even between friends, and sown strife and ill-will wherever it was possible, leading to those more dreadful outbreaks which it saddens us to hear of, in wars, with all the misery they bring. But for this enemy, and his evil-working amongst us, we

should naturally care for each other as *fellow-creatures*, made by the same Almighty Hand, and with the same natures. Still more should we love each other as redeemed by the same Lord and Saviour, and sanctified by the same Holy Spirit; as fellow-Christians—brothers and sisters in God's family, doing His Work together on earth, and looking forward in hope to join in a happier service in Heaven! May we all learn so to love each other here, that we may indeed be found fit to join the blessed company gathered together in that, our own true Home!

We have seen how *wide* the duty of love is which we owe to each other—that it takes in *everybody*, as all are our 'neighbours.' Let us now think more particularly *what is the love* that we owe to each, and how it should be shown.

'To love him as myself, and to do to all men as I would they should do unto me.'

There are not many *words* here, but *how much meaning*! Far more than is contained in the rest of the long answer which tells us our duty towards our neighbour. What follows is useful in showing us this duty in many important particulars; but the life and spirit of the commandment is in these few words at the beginning. We have already thought upon love—that highest love which we owe to God; let us now think of it as owing to our neighbour, according to the rule here given us.

May we not learn *something* of it from our own hearts? Do we not know something of the *happiness* of loving, though it may have been felt and shown but in part towards those only who are 'near and dear' to us? And do we not know something, too, of the *self-denial* of true love? Has it not led us to *give up* our own likings for the sake of some other that we wished to please? If not, we are poor indeed. But let us look again at the Catechism, they will teach us what we want to know:—'To love him as myself, and to do to all men as I would they should do unto me.'—'As myself.' Let us think—what is the measure of love that we show to *ourselves*? The love of ourselves is as the air we breathe. Though it has to do with every movement of mind or body, we do not notice it, or think of it. But a very little thought will serve to show what it is to us. Are we not always, naturally, *caring* about ourselves, and doing what we can to secure our ease, our comfort, and our pleasure? And this in things both great and small.

We need not, then, go further than our own hearts to learn how we should care for and love our 'neighbour.' 'Care' for him, *think* of him, in the first place. What a falling short there is here, at the very beginning, in our love towards others! If we go on, we may be too sure that we shall find it no less. If we fail even to *think* about our neighbours' interests, it is certain that love will

not be shown as it ought to be in words and deeds. And in studying the 'golden rule,'—doing as we would be done by, let us notice that it would lead us not only to say and to do kind things, but leave *unsaid* and *undone* such things as we should *not* like. This seems to be generally forgotten; but yet is it not plainly quite as much our duty as the other? Let us, then, bear it in mind all the more carefully that it is lost sight of by others. From want of care and thought, (not so much, we may hope, from ill-feeling,) we fall short very sadly of the kindness that we owe each other, in both these ways. We do many things that we ought not to do, and leave many things undone that we ought to do. Who indeed 'can tell how oft he offendeth?' But after all, the doing things, or leaving them undone, does not make up the whole of the duty of *love*. They may indeed have *nothing to do with it*, as St. Paul teaches us in 1 Cor. xiii. 3. If our kind acts do not come from a principle of love—from a heart that is at least *learning* to love—they are worthless. What is it that we all care for *most*—far more than even kind words or deeds in themselves? And what is it that gives such words or deeds their chief value, so far as they *are* acceptable to us? Is it not the certainty that what is said or done to us by others, comes from a *feeling of love* in them? Where we know that there is love, is it not a comfort and pleasure to us even to be *thought* of, though love

may not show itself in any open way? Is it not what we *like best* in others, to feel *sure of their hearts*, to know their kind *intentions* towards us, to be free from all fear of unkind suspicions, or of having a meaning put upon our conduct which does not belong to it—to feel that we can speak to them freely, to be sure of a kind answer? (How much of the trouble and anxiety there is in the world is caused through the absence of this loving confidence!) If Christians really fulfilled their duty to each other, would not such a happy state of things as this be the *rule* amongst us? But we know that it is not so now, though there was such a time once, when the very heathen were led to exclaim, from what they saw in the behaviour of Christians to each other, ‘See how these Christians love!’ May each of us do his part to bring about that blessed state of things again!

These are only the *beginnings* of thoughts which may be opened out endlessly. As to what has just been said of the happy confidence that we ought all to be able to have in each other, which we *should* feel if things were as they ought to be, it would be both a pleasant and a profitable exercise for us, to imagine what would take place as time went on, if the world really did learn to practise the great lesson of love—drawing pictures in our mind of loving and friendly intercourse, and of all the benefits that would at once flow from it—in every way, and amongst all classes. If we could paint

such a picture at all fully or clearly, we might gain some idea of Heaven itself.

We see that no *outward acts*, however kind, no *mere* words or deeds, though pleasant in themselves, can supply the want of *love itself*, from which they ought to spring, and which alone can give them real value. We spoke of this as a 'feeling' and as a 'principle.' In *perfect* love these go together. But we are only *learning* to love, and that under difficulties. The world is used to go on without love, (that is, of the truest and best kind,) and is not ready either to value it at its real worth, or to accept it at our hands, even when offered. So we may often expect to meet with coldness, and even rebuffs, just when, perhaps, we are trying most earnestly to please, and to bring out love in others. We shall not always be understood; and if we *are* understood, we may fail to gain the end we are seeking after. And then there are some people in whom we can see so little to like—possibly so much that is *unpleasant* to us—that we may find it almost impossible to love them. Now in such cases, love must indeed be imperfect at first; we cannot have the *feeling* of love, but we may still exert the *principle*; and in doing so may hope that the feeling will come by-and-by. And what is the 'principle?' It may be said to be that sense of duty which leads us to act as we should if we had the feeling, though we have not that to help us. It may not

be *easy* so to act, but we must remember that *in this very thing lies our trial*. Love, when perfect, makes all things not only easy but delightful; but we must not look for this at first, nor until we have had a sufficient training in the self-denying part of this great duty. Let us not doubt but that we shall have the encouragement we naturally long for, as we go on. It will assuredly overtake us in the end, if we persevere, and the *sooner*, the more earnest are the efforts we make.

Though we all need to learn more of the love we owe our neighbour, it may nevertheless be worth while to say a word on the *restraints* to be placed on even love itself, to such as may be led into the error of excess. For, with all the selfishness that prevails generally in the world, there may be, and there are, mistakes of this kind. Let it then be remembered that, though it is indeed a great part of our duty to prove our love by manner, and by words, as well as by deeds, there are cases in which we must be content to *hide* it for a while, and *many* in which it can only be shown *outwardly* in a very imperfect degree. It may be right, in many instances, to show the warmth we feel; but we must guard against giving way to what is *merely* natural feeling, such as would carry us *beyond* duty in one direction, while it came *short* of it in another. True 'Charity' (the highest and widest—the most *Heavenly* kind of love,) is founded in Duty, and takes Duty as

its rule throughout. No other rule could possibly suffice to enable us to steer our way with wisdom in this great matter. What we call 'friendships' are good and beautiful, so far as they may be pure and unworldly ; but there may be, and too often there is, an *alloy* in them which spoils them for the wider work—God's work of love—lying before us all. There may be, indeed, much *selfishness* even in love of this kind, though little suspected. Let us beware of making any friendships (in the special sense) in which true Charity, and the love of God, is not the real foundation ; and even in loving good people, remember the warning given by our Lord in St. Matthew, x. 37.

Again, as in the case of parents whose duty it is to correct their children, we may be obliged sometimes to say or to do that to our neighbour which he will not like—which he may even think really unkind. This may be either for his own higher good, on account of others, or for the sake of truth and justice. In such cases, we must learn to steel our hearts to the thought of the pain we may have to give, though careful not to make it felt more than is necessary—looking on to the good to arise out of this self-denial by-and-by. If, by anything that we can do or say, we can lead others to a better performance of their duty, shall we not benefit them in a far higher way than any other ? But in all this we shall indeed have to look to the guidance of a higher Wisdom than our own.

This may give some idea of the duty of love that we owe to each other; but it is little. There is far more to be thought of about love. If we would obtain a fuller and a better view of it, we must make a study of St. Paul's description of 'charity,' already referred to. From this we shall learn that the *largest part* of love is that which is shown in *patience, forbearance*, and such virtues. It is not easy to show all the active kindness that ought to be shown by each of us to the rest; but this is less difficult than *patient suffering of injuries*—bearing with that in our neighbour which we dislike, and giving up our own will to follow his, in the way of self-denial for his benefit, comfort, or pleasure. But this is what we are called to; and our best help in doing it will be the thought of the Example set before us in the life of Him Who alone, of all who have ever lived in the world, has shown us what *perfect* love can be. In His life He has given us the highest pattern of love; and in His teaching He has given us the highest rule, as well as motive. Let us think upon these.

How precious should each one of His sayings be to us—His professed disciples and followers—for whom He gave *Himself*! *Are they so* indeed? Cold as our love towards each other may be, it should not be so towards 'our Lord and only Saviour.' *Do we treasure each word of His?* He said—

‘*This is My Commandment, That ye love one another, AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.*’

Here is a rule of love indeed—high above all that we have yet thought of; high as heaven is higher than earth; and yet in some sense *within our reach*; for it is given us by Him, Who is Man as well as God. Shall we not open our hearts to receive it?—hold it fast, and act upon it in His strength?

‘AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.’

OH, who can measure that love?—We cannot speak worthily of it. For though we know that our Lord loved us *even to Death*, we do not know what that Death was to Him—when, in the midst of the horrors which overwhelmed His Holy Soul, the Light of His Father’s Countenance was for a season withdrawn—those ‘unknown agonies,’ which closed a Life of self-denial, toil, and sorrow, such as the world had never seen—and all *for us!*

‘AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, THAT YE ALSO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.’

He vouchsafes to repeat this His Commandment. Did He not know, in this, our dulness of heart? Oh, let us learn to open our heart and mind and soul to what He says to us! Let us

not faint in the self-denials that we shall have to practise for His sake, in fulfilling His own blessed command. He will see it, He will know it, He will approve it all; He will strengthen us with the strength of His Divine Love, and give us an abundant return in His own good time.

We see something of the *spirit* of the 'New Commandment' of Love—what it would lead us to do and to feel, *generally*, towards our neighbour. How it would show itself *in details* we learn in the Catechism. The rule of duty in particular cases is there so plainly set forth, that it would seem to require no further explanation. But it may be useful, nevertheless, to call attention to one point of great importance—concerning the *government of the tongue*. Let this be done, therefore, in a few words.

We may well give our thoughts to this—in a special way: for it has more or less to do with every part of our duty; and yet it is perhaps less regarded than any. What is said of it in the 'Duty to our Neighbour?' 'To hurt nobody by word.' 'To keep my tongue from evil-speaking, lying, and slandering.'

Perhaps we satisfy ourselves too easily that we keep clear of sins of this kind. If so, it is because we have not thought enough of *what they are*, nor of the danger we are in of falling into them. That danger is really very great indeed. 'Lying

and slandering,' indeed, we may hope to guard against in ourselves; we cannot but know enough of them to avoid them, (at least in their worst forms,) by being commonly careful; but there is a difference with regard to 'evil-speaking,' which needs to be looked into a little more closely. What does it mean? It must be something distinct from 'slandering,' or it would hardly be mentioned *besides*; and the difference seems to be this:— 'Slandering' is imputing evil *falsely*, whereas 'evil-speaking' may be founded in truth. We are to refrain, then, not only from saying anything *untrue* against our neighbour, but from speaking of even his actual faults, without sufficient cause. The general rule of love would surely tell us the same thing. If we act upon that, if we do to our neighbour as we would wish him to do to us, we shall be very careful how we speak of him—and that what we do say, shall be such as to lead others to think well of him, if possible. For what is there that hurts *us* so much as people saying unkind things of us, or bringing our faults into notice? But how is it with us generally? Do we observe and keep the rule of love in this matter? Do we keep any rule at all in it? and set *any* 'watch before our mouth?' It may be hoped we take care, in a general way, to say nothing but the *truth*; so far, we avoid falling into great sin; but this is little, indeed, compared with the whole of our duty, in regard to the use

of our tongue. If there *be* any rule observed about talking, generally, is it not rather something of this kind—to say *what we please*, and to talk *whenever we feel inclined* to do so. As if this full freedom of speech were really safe and wise; and as if there were in it no sin, and no danger of sinning! But that it is neither right nor wise, we are very plainly taught in Holy Scripture. See Proverbs, x. 19; xiii. 3; xiv. 33; xv. 2; xvii. 9, 27, 28; xxix. 11. Ecclesiastes, v. 3. James, i. 19. St. Matthew, xii. 36, 37.

We might learn the same thing from what we so often see and hear of the mischief done in the world by this free use of the tongue. We cannot but know it, when we think at all upon it, and trace the *beginnings* of evil—though we might not otherwise notice it. There is, perhaps, no habit so evil in itself,—so hurtful both to ourselves and others,—and so certain to lead to sin and trouble hereafter. How many a heart-ache might have been spared—how much anxiety and vexation have been avoided—and how much sin prevented,—if Christians had but learnt to govern their tongues—if there had been less talk and more thought in the world! There is a fearful power for evil in the tongue. See what St. James says of it. iii. 6–8, &c. One wrong word seems a small thing; but who can tell how much evil may come from it, or how far that evil may spread?—evil, too, which, humanly speaking, *can never be undone*.

Those persons whose light and foolish talk has brought about this evil, may be far from *intending* it—but none the less are they the *doers* of the mischief; and none the less surely are they laying up for themselves sorrow and trouble hereafter. Why should we run such risks as these, merely to pass away time, or make lively conversation? Surely it would be far better to be silent, (if we cannot trust ourselves to say what is wise,) even if we should be thought wanting in liveliness by those who see no need of such caution. Their blame will not really harm us in the end; and we may always *hope* that good example will have some effect upon those who are more wisely disposed.

It is through this free and lawless use of the tongue that we fall into the special sin of ‘evil-speaking.’ We may be led to speak evil of our neighbour, without at first feeling any ill-will towards him. We may not wish to say anything but what is kind and fair about him. But *failings* are generally more noticeable than *good* points; and in passing judgment of any kind upon others, we are too likely to say more of them than we ought, unless we are careful to balance good and evil fairly and truly. And who *can* do this? Therefore, because we cannot know enough of our neighbour to form a strictly just opinion of him, is it not better, if we must say something, to let it be as little as we can in the way of blame, and

to bring forward, rather, what we know to be good? This is not merely safe or kind, but it is right and wise. For, while we may do serious harm by setting forth the faults of others, (in speaking of them,) no mischief is done by dwelling on their virtues, if real. And it is the more necessary to be *careful*, as we are so liable—not only to make *mistakes* ourselves, as to what people do, and why they do anything, but to lead others into mistakes too, by our way of reporting what we may have seen or heard. A very false colour is often put upon things in this way, though there may be no wilful or malicious *intention* of doing so.

It may, however, be our *duty* to speak of the faults of our neighbour. In that case, we must not shrink from what ought to be a painful task to us; but go through with it, and do it faithfully, and without fear of the consequences to ourselves. And if we would do it, not only faithfully, but *in charity*, we shall take with us such rules as the following :

1. To remember (as just said) the general need of *caution*, on account of our ignorance of the whole truth about anyone, and the danger of our putting a false colour on the actions or motives.
2. To consider fairly what might be said in the way of *excuse* for the faults we see.
3. To be careful *before whom* we speak.
4. To see that we do indeed speak *from a pure motive*—

from a sense of what is just and right, and not merely because we feel hurt, or from an idle love of talking. 5. To remember *our own shortcomings*, which, if looked into, might prove more serious than those of the person we think deserving of blame. Is not this what our Lord Himself directs us to do in St. Matthew, vii. 3-5? See also what comes just before, from His own mouth, on 'judging' our neighbour.

If we indeed bear all this in mind, in speaking of others, we cannot be far wrong. But have we not all much to learn in this matter?

It is our duty, no doubt, not to shut our eyes altogether to the faults of our neighbour—and for his own good, as well as for the sake of others, sometimes to say what we think and feel about them. But—weak creatures that we are every way—we fail in this part of our duty almost as much as in any other. Though too ready to censure others, when we see nothing to fear in doing so, we shrink from it when it is a duty only to be done at some risk to ourselves. It is surely *to our neighbour himself* that we should speak of his faults, rather than to others: but is this what is generally done? Sometimes, perhaps, when we are *provoked*; but not *as a duty*, or when we are afraid to do so.

It is generally easier, and safer, to make our remarks when he is not by to hear them; and this is, unhappily, the rule. A feeling of *duty* can

have little to do with this; and *charity* is indeed put out of the question.

We have a distinct rule on this point, also, from the highest authority. See St. Matthew, xviii. 15-17.

‘Between thee and him alone.’ Can we not see the reason for that? Is it not part of the *great* rule of doing as we would be done by? What a *plain* rule this is! so mercifully given us to help out our slowness to understand the rule of love; and yet we will not even meet it so far as to think upon it! When we *do* consider, we see how wise and good it is. For how many of the sad disputes which arise amongst us are caused—or at least made much worse than they would have been—through some mistake, or want of fuller explanation! And how many of those who now refuse to own themselves in the wrong, would do so, if such an opportunity as this were given them!

Let us carry these thoughts a little further. If it is so necessary to be careful how we speak of others *generally*, what degree of caution should we observe in speaking of those who are *set over us*, in any way, whether parents, pastors, or masters, or rulers in any sense? We are bound to ‘honour all men;’ but to these in an especial manner ‘honour is due.’ The word is used twice in that part of the Duty to our Neighbour which relates to them. Let us think what it *implies*. If we

are not as careful as we ought to be in what we say of people in general, do we take better care not to offend *here*? Let us remember—it is a thought which may well make us serious—that our superiors are to us, in a certain sense, *in the place of God*. It is for this reason that we are to pay special heed to them; to honour, and to obey them. They may be wise, and good, and kind; and if so, we shall obey them with pleasure. But even if they should not be so, our duty remains the same. We shall remember the words of St. Peter—1 Peter, ii. 13, 14, 18, &c. At the time St. Peter wrote these words, Nero was reigning over the Roman empire—one of the most wicked and tyrannical of all the heathen emperors. Now, if a heathen ruler, and such a ruler even as *Nero*, was to be honoured for God's sake, what kind of honour ought to be paid to those in authority over us in these days, being 'Christians?' And, amongst these, what honour shall we think due, in particular, to the 'spiritual pastors' who are set over us, in a special way, by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself? Are they not *His Messengers* to us in a higher sense than any others? All 'the powers that be' have a claim to our obedience; but to none has authority been committed in so distinct and solemn a manner as to these.

'Behold, I send you forth; . . . he that heareth you, heareth Me; and he that despiseth you, de-

spiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me, despiseth Him that sent Me.'

These words were said to those whom our Lord sent to preach the Gospel while He was yet on earth, claiming honour supreme; they come (if possible) with even greater force to us, now that He is no longer with us in bodily Presence. He is indeed always present, in a sense most real, wherever there is a faithful heart to receive Him; but we still need the careful tending and teaching of His ministers, and, in His love and mercy, He has not left us without it. Let us remember that our 'spiritual pastors' do indeed stand in the same place to us as the Holy Apostles did to the first Christians; and let us pay them honour accordingly, both in word and deed. Let us be careful *generally* 'that we offend not in our tongue;' and be most especially careful here. It is a light thing to say that we hurt our own souls by speaking against anyone; the sin is against God. 'Let us therefore *fear*.'

'By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.'

'If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.'

These are but a few thoughts, set forth in very imperfect manner, upon that which is most worthy to be studied by us all. As each of us must

Answer for himself, when this short trial-time is over, and the End has come ; so let each learn to Think for himself now, guided by the great Rules given to all. We cannot but be led in such a way to see our Duty clearly. May we all have Grace to do it !

Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity ; and that we may obtain that which Thou dost promise, make us to love that which Thou dost command ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE END.

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